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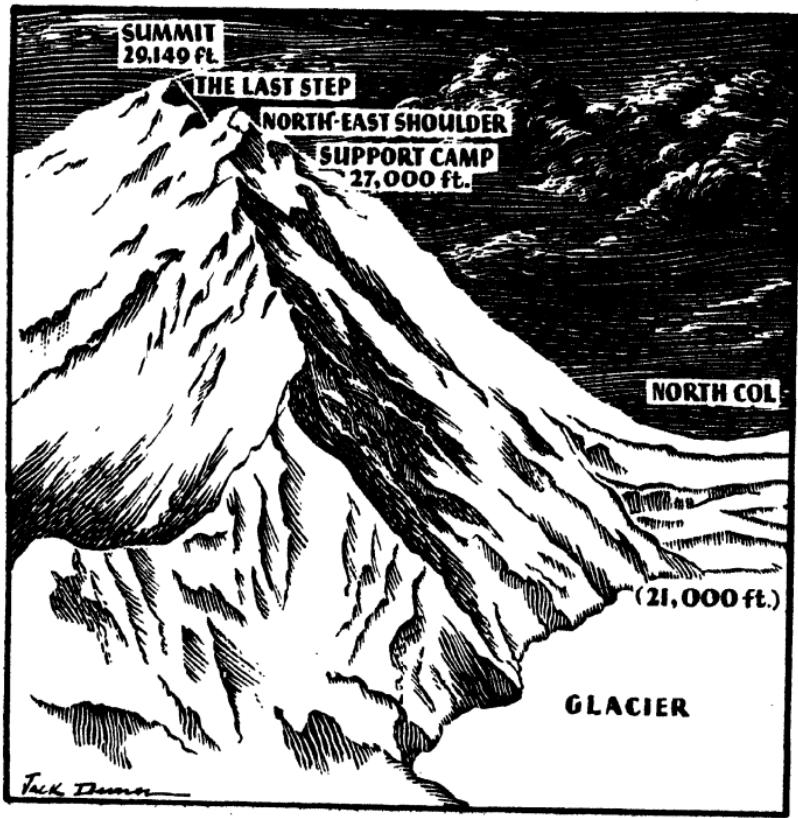
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ATTACK ON EVEREST



ATTACK ON EVEREST

by

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PREFACE

THIS book is the elaboration of a series of articles on attempts to climb Mount Everest, which appeared in the *News Chronicle*. Their publication suggested a wider treatment of the subject, to include as much as possible of the history of the Himalayan adventure.

The official history of Himalayan exploration is largely inaccessible to the general public, but the exploits of the explorers and mountaineers are known through newspaper accounts of their efforts, and by films and lectures. It is mainly from these sources that the material of the book is drawn. Due acknowledgement is made of quotations from sources other than those available in this way, in particular to F. S. Smythe for certain passages quoted from his *Kamet Conquered*.

Public interest in the conquest of Mount Everest grows, and it is hoped that the brief survey given here will satisfy legitimate curiosity on the subject.

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FOREWORD

THE technique of attack upon the mountains is comparatively new; the history of their conquest young. Until within less than a century ago they were barriers unsurmountable to thought and deed. Men dreamed, but rarely tried to translate into action, the dream of climbing to their topmost peaks. There, in Europe, as in Asia, the gods dwelt, or, if not the gods, the elements more terrible, to affront whose wrath was death. There were passes through the Alps; one knew what lay upon the other side, other lands, other peoples—no mystery—so why attempt to scale their summits?

But there were men to whom the summits were as lodestars; early pioneers who devoted their lives to this new, and insane science of mountaineering. First the Alps—the Wetterhorn climbed in 1854 by Sir Alfred Wills. The Wetterhorn where now the tourist goes gaily of an afternoon, roped, across the glacier. It's such fun when Peter the guide swears at the Old Maid of the party who is afraid to jump over the "crevasses." Coffee and cakes at the hut, and then, for the hardier ones—Bert and Alf, and the sporty mill-girls from Lancashire—a climb up the laddered rock face, as high as it's safe to allow them to go.

Then came Whymper's ascent of the Matterhorn in 1865—Mont Blanc.

A technique was evolved; rockcraft learned in the English Fells; snowcraft, perfected by trial and error in

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the Alps ; the use of the rope, pitons wedged into the rock wall to make a ladder, crampion-clamped boots, the ice-axes.

Men learned to read the face of the mountain for warning signs as they had learned to read the moods of sea and sky. Icefalls and rockfalls ; the menace of the overhanging ice cornice, thin as a blade, transparent as glass, gleaming along the crests of narrow ridges. There were the slant rock faces continually swept by falling stones ; the treacherous couloirs, deep scars cut in the mountain face by the shrapnel sweep of the avalanche. The pitfall of snow-filled crevasse ; the uncertainty of the snow bridge spun by nature across the green depths as a trap for the unwary.

Many lives were given, but the courage of the pioneers was a call to the adventurous. The Alps were conquered. After the mountaineer came the engineer, and on summits once inviolate one now may climb, via funicular, to see dawn and sunset from the hotel lounge (dinner and dance thrown in) if—unlike Mark Twain's Innocents, one does not oversleep and get these phenomena mixed up.

After the Alps, the Caucasus, the Rockies, Andes, the great ranges of New Zealand, and the proud peaks of Africa. Kilimanjaro (19,700 feet) was climbed in 1889 by Dr. Hans Meyer. In the same year, J. E. S. Mackinder reached the summit of Mount Kenya.

Then the mountain-men turned their eyes towards the Asian giants. But here was different mettle. Here were unknown lands, trackless, forbidden of access. No pleasant tourist's trip here to the hotel at the mountain's foot ; no help from trained guides ; no known routes to the summit.

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This was the Himalaya, last refuge of the gods; guarded by peoples jealous of their trust to keep the sanctuary inviolate, fearful of the divine wrath should they permit the profanation of the holy places where no man, except a saint might dare to venture.

And seeing the mountains from Darjeeling, wave upon wave, crest after crest, each higher than the Alps, the Andes—Aconcaguas (23,000 feet) dwarfed in comparison—it was easy for men to share the awe their might imposed upon the Eastern mind—but very difficult to disdain the challenge. It was not disdained.

Though Everest was unattainable for political reasons, there were others among the wilderness of peaks against which man might pit his skill.

In 1892 Sir Martin Conway explored the Karakoram range and climbed a peak of 23,000 feet. A new technique of mountaineering was called for in tackling these giants, the technique of exploration in unknown country allied to that of climbing under conditions of severity rarely encountered in the Alps. To approach the mountains, men must fight their way through hundred miles of jungle, must go armed and provisioned for the siege, with cavalcade of followers, suffering extremes of heat and cold, running the gauntlet of death or disease in the dark forests, facing the problems of transport and provisioning in the desolate places.

If the approaches to the mountains were formidable, their physical aspects, once the climb began, were overwhelming. Here, at altitudes, higher than ever before reached, the obstacles were gargantuan by Alpine scales. Precipice, ice-wall and glacier, were mountains in themselves; there were no standards of comparison

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by which the mountaineer could measure his strength. Greatest of all the forces arrayed against him was the lack of oxygen in the thin air of the high altitudes. It seemed as though there was a point beyond which man could not go.

But the attack on the mountains continued. In 1895 A. F. Mummery was killed in climbing Nanga Parbat; in 1906, the Duke of the Abruzzi was forced to retreat when almost at the summit of the Bride Peak, (25,110 feet) in Karakorams. A year later Dr. T. G. Longstaff, with two Italian guides, climbed the highest summit then attained, Trisul, 23,406 feet. An attempt to climb Kanchenjunga in 1905, under the leadership of Mr. Aleister Crowley, ended in three deaths.

The mountains repulsed all efforts to subdue them. But in death, disaster and defeat man was undismayed. Beaten back, he waited for the moment when he might advance again to the attack. Not Kanchenjunga, Nanda Devi, Nanga Parbat, this time, but Everest—the world's highest mountain.

Mountains of diplomacy had to be moved before the day came when men first pitted their skill and courage against the monarch of the Himalaya. This book tells the story of the five attempts that have been made to reach the summit, nearly 30,000 feet above sea level; the story of the legends and mystery of the mountains and the strange land of which she is the deity, of how British mountaineers have slowly overcome the mountain's defences and reached the highest point upon the earth; of how two men may have conquered her and dying, left her enigma unguessed.

With the story of Everest goes the tale of triumph and failure on other Himalaya peaks, a noble record which

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we share with men of German blood. But ours, is perhaps, the greatest claim to pride in these achievements. Mount Everest, though it does not belong to England (it is claimed by the State of Nepal), has become an English possession almost by right of conquest—the conquest yet to come. The only challenge yet received to English rights of precedence in reaching the summit is that from a party of Japanese mountaineers. The French, more gallant in the Himalaya lists, have waived advancement of their claim.

Whoever, in the end, is first upon the peak, it matters not. It has an English name and will for ever be associated in history with English courage and determination, or, perhaps one should say “British” courage, for was it not a Clydesdale and a Macintyre who piloted the ‘planes that flew above the summit of the mountain?

N. M.

SECTION I
THE FORBIDDEN MOUNTAIN

I

SNOW sweeping in blinding sheets across the face of the mountain, whirling in great scours over the higher rock and ice slopes, eddying in the lee corners and crannies formed by precipice and cleft, spiralling upwards from these depths to burst in iridescent spume, smitten and dispersed by wind buffets.

Snow, diaphanous as silver dust, beautiful to see in its white witches' dance beneath the brilliant sunshine, against the intense blue of these ultimate altitudes where earth ends and the heavens open. But snow as treacherous as beautiful, the vapour breath of the north-west wind, prelude to the thunder crash of avalanche.

Could they attempt the ascent? They had come so far and fought against frustration. Above the switch-back slope of the North Col Ridge the face of Everest lay clear and sphinx-like in the sun, unveiled, desirable, attainable.

Come and find me, it seemed to say; you know the way, you have been here before; I hold you living and dead. You cannot resist me. I am She of the Mountains. They who would gaze into my eyes must give their lives in service, the old till their craggy knees no longer can surmount the first steps of my throne, the

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young, till they too grow old and spent or I have kissed them with my icy lips.

But some day He shall come, and standing face to face shall read the riddle of my eyes. And I may suffer him to go again, back to the world of men, a little mad, maybe, with wonderment and power. Or I may let him gaze, then send him blinded forth to stumble into nothingness, his secret mine.

Yes, they would make the attempt. Camp V, 23,000 feet up, from which they had been driven, must be re-occupied. Wyn Harris and Shipton would go first over the old track, to test it. If they succeeded the others could follow with the porters. They set out roped, those remaining behind watching their progress up the slopes of the North Col. Seemed to be going all right, slowly but steadily upwards for about 500 feet. Then they cut across the icy slopes diagonally towards the top of the ridge. Half-way across the ice opened with a rending crack as ice-floes do upon the sea. And, as ice-floes do in the swirl of the current, the blocks of splitting ice widened and parted, and began a slow, sinister slide towards the precipice 400 feet below.

It all happened in a minute. Shipton, isolated on a moving block of ice, the rope spinning out. In a moment it would taughтен, jerk Wyn Harris off his feet. . . . Wyn Harris leapt from his sliding foothold, backwards towards a crevasse, face down, ice-axe buried deep as it would go in a cleft. A few quick twists of the rope around it. It held. The rope tautened and Shipton, at the other end, was pulled slowly sideways, away from the sliding ice. The weight of his body almost pulled the axe from its hold, but Harris, now lying sideways against the slope, feet braced, was easing

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the strain with his hands. Now Shipton was clear of the moving mass, lying breathless from the jerk, on firmer ground. The avalanche slid onwards to the precipice edge. Further away a crash like thunder gave a warning salvo. Everest's artillery, a thousand tons of ice and snow, shot with projectile force across the lips of precipices, to hurtle through the air and burst like shrapnel on the glacier 10,000 feet below.

That was the end of the 1936 expedition to Mount Everest—the fifth attempt to scale the mountain's 29,141 feet high peak, and perhaps, the most disappointing in its history. Other expeditions, beginning with that of 1922, had made remarkable progress, establishing camps to a height of more than 27,000 feet, individual members reaching altitudes of more than 28,000 feet. Mallory and Irvine, who lost their lives in 1924, in an attack on the summit from the highest camp, may even have reached their goal before death snatched the triumph from them.

Is Everest unclimbable? Will man ever reach the summit on foot? Is it worth while risking lives in the attempt? To these questions the mountaineer gives answers respectively—No: Yes: Yes.

F. S. Smythe, who has reached a higher point on Everest than any man, once said: "Everest is humbug." He meant in the climbing sense; the technical difficulties to be overcome, compared with those encountered in the Alps or on other of the Himalaya peaks. But later experience has shown that Everest, from and above the great ice-barrier of the North Col (23,000 feet) has defences more formidable than were at first supposed. Walls of ice; great areas of slab rock, steep and slippery as a slate roof where powdery, drift snow

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gives no foothold, where frostbitten hands can find no fingerhold; violent changes in the weather, hurricane winds and blizzards, the physical and mental deterioration which besets climbers at these great heights, and the short duration of the climbing season due to the monsoon air-currents loosening the avalanches.

Mount Everest is the highest peak in all that wilderness of mighty spurs that form the Himalaya range, gigantic alpine barrier between the lofty central Asian plains and the great continental tongue of India and her border states. In altitude these summits range from 22,000 feet to 25,000 feet. Kanchenjunga, next in importance to Everest, is 28,156 feet high, a thing of beauty and terror, sheer pinnacle of ice, whose summit is unscaleable, though many adventurers, F. S. Smythe among them, have braved the horrors of her avalanches.

These are the supreme mountains of the earth, tossed high in some convulsion of the primal age and stricken immobile, a frozen ocean of lava waves whose crests are on the outer fringe of space, whose depths and hollows are the secret places of the earth, unknown and inaccessible; rock-girt gorges set about by forest, swamp and interlocking jungle, within whose grim recesses life may pullulate shut off for ever from the outer world. Himalaya, "Abode of Snow." At least forty heights exceed 24,000 feet. On the southern slopes there are perpetual snows to within 15,000 feet of sea-level; at the top of the northern tableland of Tibet the snow line is as high as 20,000 feet. This mountain continent makes its own weather conditions, so vast is it; has its own variations of climate, from coldest, airless, arid heights, to dank, steamy, sunless deeps, glaciers whence torrents run, "through caverns

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measureless to man" down to the sun-parched plains of India. Here the Ganges, the Indus, the Bramaputra, the Alakanda, burst smitten from the ice-bound rock, to wind a hundred miles through hidden valleys, subterranean gorge and leagues of treacherous tarai marsh, to spread their healing waters on the plains and so to find the ocean and the end of all things, reabsorption in the infinite, recreation and rebirth—very symbol of the pantheistic cults that give them adoration.

To Buddhist and to Brahmin the Himalayas are the holy places of the gods. Tibetan animistic demonology, and Hindu transcendental mysticism find in them material substance of spiritual myth, and no man, even he whose god is but a mathematical formula, inhabiting the finite infinite, can fail to be awed before their awful majesty. Endless succession of range after range, valley, mountain, glacier, rushing torrent, winding river with its burial ghats, precipice, plain, snow, solitude and tiger-haunted forest.

The emotion awakened in the soul of the Western man who contemplates this vastness is a spiritual one, akin to, though divorced by barriers of race and thought from that of the humble devotee who travels barefoot from the plains to cleanse his body in the snowline waters.

The mountaineer, lifting his eyes to these hills, has vowed to conquer them, to struggle upwards to the heights and stand, one breathless moment on the topmost peak, the kingdoms of the earth beneath, his soul elate, though death be the reward. Beaten, to try again until, at length, he knows that man has triumphed.

Following the failure of the 1924 Mount Everest Expedition and the deaths of Mallory and Irvine,

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permission of the Tibetan Government was sought to dispatch another expedition. But the Tibetans asked that the request might not be pressed. The moment was not propitious. The gods of the mountain must not be disturbed. Everest was sacred; its sanctity must be respected.

"This feeling," Sir Francis Younghusband wrote, "all mountaineers could understand. To them also, the great heights are sacred and to be approached only with reverence and awe, though none the less with a mighty attraction. The stature of the mountain cannot increase but the stature of man can. The mountain can grow no higher. It can employ no weapons save those we already know—deadly cold, terrific winds, avalanches, snow, ice, rocky precipice—above all—rarefied atmosphere. But we know them, and know the worst they can do. And they cannot be augmented. Everest cannot use poison-gas or hurl bombs from the air.

"Man, on the other hand, can profit by experience. He can bide his time. He can watch for unguarded moments. He can equip himself against cold and wind. He can train himself against snow and ice and precipice. He can acclimatize himself against the want of oxygen in the air. . . .

"No one would be foolhardy enough to say that even this expedition (1933) will succeed. What is certain is that some day man will stand on the summit of the mountain.

"And what then? Who will be one ounce the better for it? The man who does stand there will have gone through incredible hardship and have spent himself to the limit. What is the good of it all . . . ? This is

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the old question which is asked over and over again. . . . Shortly, the answer is, that climbing Everest raises the standard of achievement. Mountaineers have long passed the Alpine standard. They have adopted the Himalayan; now they are setting up an Everestian standard. Such is the profit of climbing Everest.

“And not only for mountaineering will the standard be raised, but for other fields of human activity as well. Many who have never been near a mountain have been thrilled by descriptions of the climbers’ efforts and have been spurred on by them to higher achievement in their own.

“Everest has become a symbol. Everest stands for all that is highest and purest and most difficult of attainment. As the climbers struggle gasping towards the summit they will be putting heart into all who are striving upward in whatever field. This knowledge will do most to put heart into themselves. So, in the words of Somervell” (climber with the 1922 Everest expedition) “written on the day after his splendid failure: ‘The fight is worth it—worth it every time.’ ”

II

To Sir Francis Younghusband, more perhaps than to any other man, is due the honour of leader and inspirer in this high resolve to conquer Everest. Other mountaineers, men of science, with spiritual emotions more subdued, may have less exalted ideas about the aim of this achievement—geographical, metereological, botanical, physical aspects. But the fact remains that behind all these word shadows there is the spiritual

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resolve, the material urge if you will, which has sent men forth on hazards whose physical ends were secondary to the sub-conscious god-hunger of conquest. To the ends of the earth ; into the air on strutted wings of wire and canvas ; to the Poles, to the Stratosphere ; into the sea deeps ; into the dark labyrinth of the philosopher's mind wherein the cosmos is resolved in thought and that which is beyond the ken of words becomes a hieroglyphic penned on paper.

The Western mind, outwardly expressing itself in action ; inwardly, in thought symbiosis : the Eastern mind, inwardly, dismissing all finite phenomena as illusory ; outwardly, in the inactions of animistic adoration. The inside and outside of the glove. Both seeking the same thing ; saying the same thing, different-wise.

Mount Everest stands on the border between Tibet and Nepal, near the eastern end of the great chain of the Himalaya range. For political reasons mountaineers are not allowed to attack the mountain from the Nepalese or southern side. For similar reasons, until within comparatively recent times, its approach from the high Tibetan plateau was equally forbidden. Tibet was the Forbidden Land. It was the British military mission of 1904, under Lieutenant-Colonel Younghusband (now Sir Francis) that, by penetrating the mountain-girt plateau and unveiling the mystery of the holy city of Lhasa, first opened the way to a siege on the mountain.

Everest was "discovered" eighty-four years ago when the great Trigonometrical Survey of India was assessing the peaks of the Eastern Himalayas. Into one of the assessors' offices (the story goes) an Indian

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assistant came running. "Sir," he said, "I have discovered the highest mountain in the world." The mountain was named Everest, after Sir George Everest, former survey chief. Apt coincidence in nomenclature. Chomolungma, "Goddess Mother of the Mountains," is its Tibetan name.

The cardinal principle of Tibetan policy for more than a century before British penetration had been made to exclude all foreigners except certain Chinese and Nepalese officials and caravans. Although the country is of vast extent this had proved a comparatively easy matter, for, from every quarter, lower Tibet has to be entered by lofty mountain passes which were easily watched, and, if necessary, blocked.

Even enterprising travellers like Dr. Sven Hedin and others had been baffled when they sought to enter the country. Indian travellers had been able to get in only when disguised as Lamas or as Nepalese or Kashmiri traders. The last Europeans to reach Lhasa were the Abbés Huc and Gabet, in 1884, who entered the country from the Chinese side, and their visit was short and made under exceptional circumstances while a crisis prevailed in consequence of an invasion of Western Tibet and the arrest of the Regent at Lhasa by the Chinese on a charge, to which he confessed, of poisoning three Grand Lamas in succession.

Yet, during the whole of the seventeenth and the first half of the following century Tibet was as free to strangers as other Asiatic countries. Capuchins and monks of other Catholic orders resided at Lhasa in the early part of the eighteenth century. It was the rise of the Ghurka power in Nepal, about 1760, their trade exactions and their invasion of Tibet which created the

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policy of seclusion. The Lamas, priest-rulers of Tibet, called on the Chinese to save them. A large Chinese army entered Tibet, repulsed the invaders and, in 1792, forced peace upon them under the walls of their capital, Khatmandu.

It was believed both by the Chinese and the Tibetans that the British had instigated the Ghurka invasion. Accordingly, the Chinese, as suzerains, closed all the passes from India to strangers, and the country was henceforth sealed against external intercourse with Europeans and natives of India.

The Tibetans themselves are an amiable, hospitable people, but Chinese subtlety played upon their ignorance of the world beyond their battlemented mountains and the superstitious fears easily engendered by the mumbo-jumbo jumble of Lamaistic religion. There was a rich trade in tea and silks to be conserved. It would decline if relations were opened between Lhasa and Calcutta.

Therefore, the Tibetans were told that the smallpox, of which they had the utmost dread (and that with sorry reason) on spiritual as well as physical grounds, would be introduced and decimate them. Their religion, to which they were devoted, would be proscribed and the Lamas would lose their power. The Indian Government policy was described to the Lamas as one of encroachment and annexation which had only been thwarted by Chinese diplomatic skill and military might.

Sikkim, whose people were of the same race as those of Tibet, had been annexed—evidence of British aggression and desire to secure the larger, richer province of Tibet.

Two Chinese Residents remained in Lhasa as symbol

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of her vassalage to Pekin. They exercised supreme political power in the country, but wisely, did not interfere in its religious observances. Largely their influence rested on the fact, obvious to the weak and peace-loving Tibetans that they had saved the land from Ghurkas and the Sikhs. Better the insolent Yellow Devils than the dark-bearded savages from India or their terrible white masters the British.

Chandra Das, the Indian Pundit—that Hindu Marco Polo—who crossed Tibet in 1879-81 describes the Chinese Residents and their retainers as being cordially hated by the people. He mentions the general belief in Tibet that, after 200 years, the Grand Lama would retire to Shambala, the fabled city of Buddhism, and would not return to Tibet. In the meanwhile the whole world would be divided by the British and the Russians whom neither the Emperor of China nor the gods and demi-gods of the Golden Mountain—Everest—would be able to arrest.

"It is the policy of the Tibetans," wrote the erudite Chandra Das, "to keep them at a distance, not by open hostilities, but by temporizing and diplomacy. They were initiated into this policy by the Ambans (the Chinese Residents) who are always apt in devising fresh plans for guaranteeing the safety of the country against all sorts of imaginary foreign aggressions."

Time passed and Chinese influence began to lessen, British and Russian influences subtly to increase. Tibet was a ripe trade plum for the plucking. Besides the Chinese, the Nepalese gained access to Tibet. It was through their hands that the trade of India passed for many years. In every large town in the Forbidden Land they had their own bazaar. Then, with the opening of

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other routes, through Bhutan and Sikkim—the way to the mountain—Indian goods found their way into Tibet through other passes. The Pundit Nain Singh, who was in Lhasa on several occasions between 1865 and 1875, describes the city as full of traders each winter, from China, Mongolia, Bhutan, Nepal and Kashmir. China sent silks, carpets and teas; Mongolia leather, horses and sheep; Bhutan and Sikkim rice and tobacco; Nepal silk, cloth, pearls, spices and Indian wares; Kashmir saffron and Indian goods. English woollens and sprigged calicoes came from India.

In March the rich caravans of the merchants left, taking with them gold, furs, musk, borax, salt and ponies. The difficulties of transport and the closing of so many routes hampered the trade in wool of which the supply was inexhaustible. Sheep therefore, were used for transport, the strong mountain-sheep of the high plateaux. Driven across the passes laden with gold and borax, they were sold together with their golden fleece in Kashmir and Bhutan.

Dr. Sven Hedin in his Tibetan travels mentions meeting those caravans of sheep between Western Tibet and Ladak.

“It was quite a pleasure,” he says, “to see how orderly they marched and how easy they were to manage, and no slope was too steep for them although they bore quite heavy loads.”

After the death of Buddha in 543 B.C., Buddhism spread slowly outwards from India, and Tibet seems to have been one of the last countries to receive it, though in a form very different from that in which, in earlier centuries, the faith had reached other lands.

“Since the original scriptures had been conveyed

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into Ceylon," says Sir Clements Markham in his sketch on Tibet, in his edition of the narratives of Bogle, the envoy of Warren Hastings, and Manning, the last Englishman to see Lhasa, in 1811—"by the son of Asoka, it had been revealed to the devout Buddhists of India that their Lord had created five celestial Buddas, and that these had created five Buddhistsatwas, or beings in the course of attaining Buddha-hood. The Tibetans took firm hold of this phase of the Buddhistic creed, and their distinctive belief is that the Buddhistsatwas continue in existence for the good of mankind by passing through a succession of human beings from the cradle to the grave. This characteristic of their faith was gradually developed, and it was long before it received its present form."

It was, in fact, the fifteenth century before the belief in the reincarnation of the two priest-rulers of Tibet—the Dalai Lama and the Teshi Lama—became fixed. Great reformers arose from time to time and were regarded as reincarnations of one or the other of the Buddhistsatwas. But at length, one of them, who died in 1474, "relinquished the attainment of Buddha-hood that he might be born again and again for the benefit of mankind. When he died his successor was found in an infant by the possession of certain divine marks."

Chandra Das tells how the reincarnated Grand Lama was discovered in 1875. The Grand Lama having died (and be it noted here that no Grand Lama except he who died a few years ago and has not yet reappeared on earth, ever survived the age of nineteen!) the Regent and the College of High Priests met and consulted a famous oracle who declared that the reincarnation could only be discovered by a monk of purest morals.

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He, by the aid of the same oracle, turned out to be a Lama in the Gadan Monastery, of great saintliness and learning.

The oracle also indicated a place to which the Lama should go and meditate. He did so, and having meditated for seven days, on the night of the last day, he heard a voice directing him to go to a certain lake. Here, in the clear water he saw reflected the image of the Grand Lama seated in his mother's lap, the furniture of the room, the house and all the surroundings being shown to him in the water. Again directed by the oracle he went towards a certain town, and while on the way stopped at a certain house for refreshment. Here he at once recognized the house of his vision and the reincarnation was found.

Is there in this, one wonders, some pale reflection of the Christian tale? The Wise Men, directed not by a star but by a vision in the waters to the humble dwelling where the God-Man-Child is found seated on his mother's lap. Who can say? All is mystery in Tibet. Much that is beautiful and pathetic in the half-barbaric ritual of Lamaism. Chomolungma, Goddess Mother of the Snows, looks down on customs cold and cruel as her peaks. Some naïvely comic to the Western mind—that of polyandry.

When a woman marries one of a family of brothers she becomes, in fact, the wife of all the brothers. The custom, like many Tibetan customs, has nothing to do with Buddhism. It may be said to owe its existence amongst a pastoral people, where the men are away for months looking after the flocks and herds, to the necessity of the brothers taking turns to stay at home and protect the house. Again, it is attributed

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to the necessity of checking the population in a country like Tibet, from which emigration is difficult and where the means of subsistence cannot be increased.

The great number of surplus women in Tibet become nuns and busy themselves copying out the Buddhist Scriptures. But the Tibetans in any case are a phlegmatic and dispassionate race. Chandra Das tells of a conversation he had with a noble Tibetan lady in whose train he travelled.

"When I told her," he says, "that in India a husband had several wives, and that amongst foreigners a man had but one wife, she stared at me in undisguised astonishment.

"'One wife with one husband?' she exclaimed. 'Don't you think we Tibetan women are better off? The Indian wife has but a portion of her husband's affections and property, but in Tibet the housewife is the real lady of all the joint earnings and inheritance of all the brothers sprung from the same mother, who are all of the same flesh and blood. The brothers are but one, though their souls are several. . . . Tibetan women are happier than Indian ones, for they enjoy the privileges conceded in the latter country to men.'"

Noble and contented Tibetan lady. Strange land of celibacy, asceticism and polyandry; people passionless and poised, finding the ways of the foreigners beyond the mountains harsh and barbarous, yet seeing nothing amiss in the adolescent immolation of their Holy One a few years after his elevation.

III

Cortes standing upon his height and gazing with a

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wild surmise, not at the Pacific but at the fabled city of Montezuma, that forbidden El Dorado set amid its lakes and canals, pinnacles, and palaces gleaming in the sun, had no deeper emotion than that which must have come to Younghusband when he and all his men first looked upon the mystery of Lhasa. The campaign had been swift and comparatively merciful. We dignified it by the name of Mission, a mission designed to arrange a commercial treaty, and to combat Russian intrigues. Britain's position towards Tibet had always been a peculiar one. She was not forcing an open door there as in China; on the contrary, she wanted to shut the door. This position was clearly set forth in the Blue Book dealing with the mission, which said:

"Any attempt to annex the wild and inhospitable upland kingdom would be the act of a madman. If the result of the present expedition be to turn the key in every gate to Tibet with a double turn, the utmost hopes of the Indian Government will be accomplished."

They were. Lord Curzon, then Viceroy of India, knew that the tighter the northern boundary of India was bottled up, the better it was for British supremacy in Nepal and Bhutan.

Younghusband dwelt strongly on the point that the maintenance of order in Tibet was a real necessity for India. "Disorder begets disorder," he wrote in his *India and Tibet*. "When Lhasa is unsteady Nepal and Bhutan are restless." Inimical Russian influence was on the wane, but the substitution of Chinese influence "exerted beyond its legitimate limits and with imprudent harshness," was producing an uneasy feeling along the North-Eastern frontier. The Chinese officials in Tibet were tactless and provocative and caused local

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friction. Great Britain had never questioned Chinese suzerainty, but had had much reason to insist that it should be exercised with restraint. We should also seek to ensure the maintenance of an effective Tibetan Government, and should hold the Chinese to their undertaking not to interfere with local autonomy in Tibet.

There was fighting, in which the Tibetans showed a surprising truculence, engagements on snowy plateaux higher than the summit of Mont Blanc, the stiffest in the steep pass of the Krao-La, a fight which, at one time, hovered on the verge of defeat. But in the end the British came within sight of the secret city, Lhasa—"the seat of the gods"—and saw it sparkling in its valley surrounded by snow-clad mountains; from afar a city of palaces and temples, dominated by the magnificent nine-story Potala, the monastery fortress dwelling of the Dalai Lama, set high upon its rocky hill, gaudy, many windowed, a marvel of architecture.

Past the monastery of Debung with its noble park; the dark-red temple of Nashang, the palaces of Norbu Leuga, Kemai Tsal and Kundulling, surrounded by groves of handsome trees till the western gateway was reached, and, crossing a bridge flanked by a thousand-year-old monolith, the expedition entered Lhasa. Up the wide central street between the blue-tiled houses overtopped by the frowning walls of the Potala.

And now the lovely city seen from the heights was revealed in all its sordid squalor. Palaces, monasteries, temples, huts, hovels, streets that were open sewers, dark runnels and dismal byways, festering beneath the towering grandeur of the Potala, sweep of red and white buildings covering the hillside from top to

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bottom with terraces, buttresses and battlements, approached on either side by broad stone stairways, zigzagging up the outward-sloping walls.

So must many a European city have appeared in medieval times. In the heart of the city, in the market-place, crowded with Tibetans, Chinese, Nepalese, Ladakis—the Jokhang, great temple of the “Jo” or Buddha. Outwardly unimpressive, “a cluster of squat buildings with glittering, gilded roofs,” but within, jewelled lamps, highly wrought gold and silver vessels richly decorated chapels, images and shrines, chanting of priests and deep pulsing vibration of gongs.

In the streets a swarming, smelly populace, humanity prowling, savage dogs in search of offal; lean, hungry pigs. No pavements, no drains. Two-storied houses of sun-dried clay, whitewashed and banded with red and yellow, blue-tiled, picturesque, repulsive; the lower halves windowless, begrimed with soot, breathing forth their inward stench to mingle with the street stinks.

Younghusband, with his wide and deep knowledge of Asiatics, insisted that the Treaty must be signed within the sacred walls of the Potala. Many men, he said, might think it foolish and ridiculous to run additional risk when the Treaty could have been signed comfortably and without risk in his own room or at the house of the Chinese Resident. “Those who have lived among Asiatics know that the fact of signing the Treaty in the Potala was of as much value as the Treaty itself.”

After the signing of the Treaty he was able to turn his attention to the sights and scenes of Lhasa. “A sorry affair,” he considered it, except for the Potala. He paid a visit to the Jokhang Temple. He had realized

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that somewhere beneath the sordid surface of Lamaism there must be some hidden source of strength, some secret spring of spiritual power. And in the Jokhang Temple, where the monstrous jewelled image of the Buddha broods, he thought he caught a glimpse of that power.

“Here it was that I found the true inner spirit of the people. The Mongols from their distant deserts, the Tibetans from their mountain homes, seemed here to draw on some hidden source of power. And when, from the far recesses of the temple came the profound booming of great drums, the chanting of monks in deep, reverential rhythm, the blare of trumpets, the clash of cymbals, and the long rolling of lighter drums, I seemed to catch a glimpse of the source from which they drew.

“Music is proverbially a fitter means than speech for expressing the eternal realities; and, in the deep rhythmic droning of the chants, the muffled rumbling of the drums, the loud clang and blaring of cymbals and trumpets, I realized this sombre people touching their inherent spirit, and, in the way most fitted to them, giving vent to its mighty surgings panting for expression.”

The signing of the Treaty, whatever else it accomplished politically, was the first step forward in the conquest of Everest. The holy city was unveiled, now the approach was clear to the holy mountain. The Dalai Lama fled from Tibet on the signing of the Treaty and took refuge in India, where he remained until 1911—by which act of wisdom he undoubtedly established the precedent in longevity unknown to his less fortunate predecessors. By virtue of a decree of the

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Emperor of China, the Tashi Lama was named high-priest of Tibet in succession to the Dalai Lama whose flight led to his denunciation and deposition by the suzerain of Pekin.

The Tashi Lama was believed to be well-disposed to the Government of India, and, in the time of Warren Hastings a good understanding was entered into with his predecessor, the third Tashi Lama. To secure the smooth working of the Treaty, it was important that the cordial relations that formerly subsisted with his predecessors should be re-established with the new ruler of Tibet.

Colonel Younghusband hurried back to Simla with the Treaty in his pocket, to see the Viceroy, and General Macdonald marched the troops back to India, but several members of the expedition, including Mr. C. Vernon Magniac, private secretary to the British Commission in Tibet, remained behind to pay a ceremonial visit to the court of the Tashi Lama.

Mr. Magniac's written account of the visit is of interest to this narrative, as showing the nature and customs of the country and giving an insight into the difficulties that lie in the way of the attack on Everest. It also demonstrates the attitude of the Tibetan people to the British and the lasting impression which the Mission made.

The Dalai Lama ("ocean priest" or "sea of wisdom") is regarded in Tibet as having supremacy in all temporal matters; the Tashi Lama, as the great spiritual teacher. Though in theory he holds the same rank as the other Grand Lama, virtually he is less powerful.

So far as was known the members of the British

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Mission were the only Europeans who had ever visited Shigatze, the holy city of the Tashi Lama, with the exception of the envoys of Warren Hastings, Mr. Bogle in 1774 and Captain Turner in 1783. Here we approach something like civilization in terms of Western manners; courtesy, grace, and a certain refinement. Shalu monastery—a very old religious establishment of Nonconformist Lamas. Verily, a creed without schism is like meat without salt. Architectural nonconformity too. Instead of the golden pagodas of the Lhasa temples, Shalu has a roof of beautiful and highly glazed green tiles. At the corners of its pagodas are finely modelled figures of demons and dragons. Remember there are figures of "demons" and "dragons" on the roofs and façades of Gothic cathedrals.

The Abbot was away but his steward entertained the visitors with buttered tea and greasy cakes.

In the chief temple our travellers saw a bust of a goddess, life-size, in gold or copper-gilt. It might easily have been a very handsome Madonna. Shalu was a notable centre for instruction in the higher mysteries of Tibetan Buddhism and black magic. To achieve these entailed so great a state of sanctity that it was necessary to pass an uncertain number of years in solitary confinement in total darkness, in a rock cell. Some seekers after holiness submitted of their own free will to be immured for life in caves in the rock, with no outlet save a trap-door barely large enough to enable the attendants to put food through. If they became sufficiently holy or sufficiently attenuated they might escape, it was said, by precipitating their bodies through this tiny aperture.

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On leaving Shalu the travellers got their first view of Tashilumbo, the Tashi Lama's monastic citadel. It was situated on the slope of a rocky spur rising steeply from the plain. In the gloriously clear light of the Himalayas, while still at a distance of twelve miles or more, the city showed up dazzlingly white against the sombre brown of the hills.

"If," says Mr. Magniac, "our first view of Lhasa, jealously guarded from view by pretty groves of green trees in a land where trees are not, with only here and there a few glittering spires and cupolas, stimulated the imagination and recalled the enchanted city with the sleeping princess of fairy legend, Tashilumbo, much more commandingly placed and, unlike the mysterious 'forbidden city,' quite open to view, stood out in the golden sunlight suggesting a Buddhist Jerusalem of ivory and gold. Nearer acquaintance confirmed our first impression that this is a far more striking and beautiful city than the much talked-of and written about 'forbidden city.' "

Five great mausoleums of the Tashi Lama's predecessors—each cathedral-like in magnificence—fringed the skyline to the north. Eastwards, an immense fort, a grey, forbidding mass of masonry, perched on a rock, marked the lay city of Shigatze. About five miles from the city the travellers were met by a cavalcade of officials, Lamas and laymen, come to welcome them. Some wore flat scarlet hats made of feathers, some orange silk hats decorated with red buttons, some a sort of dirty-yellow tam-o'-shanter, and some, pied-piper-Hamelin-like in headgear peaked and conical. Robes of yellow silk; they rode on ponies and mules caparisoned with saddle-cloths of many colours.

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Saddles, bridles, headstalls and cruppers were covered with metal inlaid with gold.

About a mile from the city an enormous tent had been pitched, where other functionaries of the Tashi Lama's court were waiting. They invited the travellers to partake of refreshments. Greasy cakes, some quite good but, as a rule, they are so greasy and full of hairs as to be uneatable, dried fruits and buttered tea, boiled rice and raisins.

Culinary digression. Buttered tea, which is to the Tibetan what beer is to the Englishman, is not the revolting beverage its name implies. Travellers on those windy plateaux come in time to yearn for their buttered tea. After all, our tea with milk or cream is not so very different. Rancid butter, which has been kept for months in a goatskin, is whisked in the bowl of hot tea, giving it a faintly soapy taste, very comforting in the frigid air of the Tibetan uplands. One may encounter buttered tea in a London restaurant—or at least something suspiciously like it. It is a fact that buttered porridge was common in the Scottish highlands some years ago—may be still—and quite good, once you conquered puling aversion.

They were assigned the house of the principle noble in Shigatze as a residence. It was a small house, well-built, solid. Rooms floored with concrete made from chalky clay mixed with pebbles, hard as marble, deep red in colour. The walls of the rooms were beautifully painted with frescoes in the Chinese fashion; the ceilings tapestryed in silk. Light entered through large Chinese paper windows; air through holes in these. A rickety ladder led from the ground floor to the first story, thence to the flat roof.

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Tashilumbo was brilliantly illuminated with thousands of butter-lamps on the night of their arrival. It was the anniversary of Purangir, the third Tashi Lama, who so hospitably entertained Mr. Bogle, the first envoy of Warren Hastings, in 1774. And, by coincidence, they had arrived on the same date as Captain Turner, the second envoy dispatched by Warren Hastings to the Court of the Tashi Lama, in 1783. Since then no Englishman had set foot within the sacred city. Purangir was, perhaps, the greatest statesman in Tibetan history, so it was considered by Government and people alike an omen of good portent that the travellers should have arrived on the anniversary of the revered ruler.

The Tashi Lama had not yet moved to his palace at Tashilumbo for the winter, so the travellers had to ride about a mile to his summer residence, an ancient and picturesque monastery in a large park east of Shigatze.

As they were about to enter they heard that General Ma, the Chinese official suspected of having instigated an attack on the Mission at Gyantze (and of a few odd assassinations) had turned up to attend the Tashi Lama's Durbar. They declined to meet him. So General Ma went out by the back door whilst they went in by the front—the slippery ladders that gives access to the stilt-built Tibetan houses, irrespective of size or importance.

Poor General Ma. Picture him, retiring with what dignity he might muster, backwards down the ladder, into obscurity. The khaki-clad British victors climbing more ladders, led by a silent monk, through several small dark rooms into the Gompa (great hall) of the monastery, large room, dim, pillared, with, at the

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further end, seated cross-legged on a throne, the Buddha reincarnate, the Tashi Lama.

A few years before he was a little peasant boy, scrubby, dirty; possibly verminous. Now, an intelligent-looking young man; pale beardless face, closely shaven head. He wore the simple dress of an ordinary monk, a shade darker maroon than that of the other Lamas who stood attentive around the dais. His expression was amiable. It was said that his prestige and reputation as the embodiment of transcendent holiness were even greater in the Buddhist world than those of the Dalai Lama, who was more feared than loved. He was twenty-two years of age, but, as incarnate Lamas never die, he was merely the re-incarnation of Purangir who, in that same throne-room had received the envoys of Warren Hastings, more than a century before.

The British officers paid their respects to this transcendent holiness. They conversed, reminding him of the long-standing friendship between his Government and that of His Majesty, the King-Emperor. He replied, saying that he personally had always been opposed to hostilities, and that now that the unfortunate differences between them had been settled by solemn treaty, he trusted friendly relations would continue. Buttered tea was served from a richly chased, golden tea-pot; greasy cakes and petrified fruits.

At the conclusion of the Durbar, the Prime Minister, who had his rooms in the same monastery, invited the guests to visit him. A small room, painted as is customary in Tibet, in many colours, apparently frescoes of the Tibetan Paradise.

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"In that country," says Mr. Magniac, "where it is the custom not only to depict a spade as a spade, and where the morals of the people are not so carefully looked after as in our own virtuous land of vigilance associations, erotic pictures which would give the latter fits, are common enough.

"But we were a little surprised to find such startlers on the walls of the sanctum of this holy man, who was just explaining that it was only as a favour to the Grand Lama that he, who was one of the Abbots of Tashilumbo, and consequently a Lama of peculiar sanctity, had condescended to undertake the office of Prime Minister to the Tashi Lama.

"But, this eccentricity apart, His Excellency, like all Prime Ministers, was much exercised about the indemnity payable under the Treaty, as he feared Lhasa would make Tashilumbo pay one-third of the amount. He asked if it would be advisable for the Tashi Lama to write personally to the Viceroy of India, and they, knowing the Home Government had already determined to make a present to Tibet of fifty laco of rupees, at the expense of the Indian tax-payer, and wishing the Tashi Lama to get the credit of the indemnity, warmly encouraged the idea."

Next day they explored the city of Tashilumbo. It is built on the slope of a rocky hill and is surrounded by a high wall with five gateways. Steep, narrow streets, some astonishly picturesque; on either side, lofty stone houses, painted white, in the centre of the larger streets, shrines to departed Lamas. Large trees grew between the flagstones of the main avenues. Within the walls, besides streets and squares, was a pretty wooded park called the "Park of Happiness,"

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temples, great monastic colleges, and the five noble tombs of the Tashi Lama's predecessors. Each of these was a beautiful and imposing temple of white stone, the upper part painted a deep crimson. Each was adorned by a huge pagoda roof heavily overlaid with gold. The tomb of the fourth Tashi Lama was, perhaps, the most picturesque. A small courtyard planted with tamarisk-trees surrounded it, and from the centre of the courtyard a steep flight of steps led to the shrine.

In the centre of the city was the palace of the Tashi Lama, and the great hall, where the monks of Tashilumbo, 5,000 strong, assembled for their devotions. Both were fine buildings ornamented by a number of small, golden pagodas. The roof of the great hall was supported by a hundred pillars. In the mausoleums the embalmed body of each Grand Lama reposed in an enormous metal urn within a marble-lined shrine. These urns were overlaid with gold, inlaid with precious stones and ornamented with exquisite repousse work. Into the smooth marble floor of each temple were let, besides pebbles and bits of coloured glass, very large turquoises and other precious stones. In each temple was a life-size bust of copper, heavily gilt, of the dead Lama, and smaller busts of gold. All the large busts were festooned with pearls and other jewels. In every temple, besides numbers of small butter-lamps of gold and silver, there was a great butter-lamp of metal ornamented by placques of gold and silver. Rich vases of *sang de boeuf* and cloisonne stood upon the altars. The tombs were guarded by great silver dragons.

The Mission remained in Tashilumbo for ten days, exchanging diplomatic courtesies and waxing perceptibly paler from the orgiastic libations of buttered

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tea which these courtesies entailed. As a return for the hospitality shown them they gave a "garden party" for the local aristocracy—the Tashi Lama's brother and uncle, ennobled from obscurity and other high officers of State.

Mutton broth, buttered tea (again!) sweet biscuits and champagne. Of the last they had three bottles which Lord Curzon had kindly sent to the Mission at Gyantze. There was an archery competition. The atmosphere of archery, cultured, controlled jollity, tea, biscuits, and the viceregal champagne was similar to that engendered at a garden party on some archeepiscopal lawn at home. The prizes aided illusion—a quantity of "Brummagem" paste jewellery—one for each competition. They wore them proudly beside the carbuncular turquoises and pearls which adorned their persons.

There was a farewell Durbar. Tibetan servants and camp followers received the blessing of the Tashi Lama, usually bestowed only on persons of high rank, their masters he received in a pavilion in the park of his summer palace. The pavilion stood on a toy island surrounded by a miniature moat. It was built of wood, the interior decorated in lacquer like a Chinese cabinet; hunting scenes, elephants, tigers and deer. Chinese and Tibetan objects of art lay scattered about.

The Tashi Lama received them alone. He talked at length and quite openly about his desire to live on terms of friendship with his powerful neighbour, India. He begged them to take an early opportunity of informing the King-Emperor of his wish to do anything in his power to encourage trade and friendly intercourse between His Majesty's Indian Empire and Tibet.

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The other ruler of Tibet—the Dalai Lama, who fled to Mongolia on the entry of the British into Lhasa, returned to his capital in 1908. Eighteen months later he was a refugee in India, honoured guest of the British Government. Most astute pontiff of his line, he had long since passed the span of adolescent apotheosis when it was decreed by the gods, the Lamas (and possibly the Chinese Residents) that such holiness must pass through the shades of death to re-emerge when time was propitious, a peasant-boy incarnation, plastic in hands cunning to fashion the living idol, and to destroy it at will. It may be that his soul had wearied of its ceaseless avatars or merely that circumstance had enabled him to play off one political ambition against the other, dicing with death, and choosing his buttered-tea-tasters with discrimination. In any case he returned to Lhasa in 1912 and remained there until his death (from natural causes) a few years ago.

When Dr. William McGovern saw him in Lhasa in 1923 he was forty-nine years of age. The interview was secret. McGovern was in the still “forbidden” city unauthorized, and the Priest-Ruler was afraid to grant him a public audience lest it be made the basis for agitation against him. But his curiosity had been aroused. He received McGovern alone in a small room of the Potala.

“ . . . a smallish man, lighter in build and with a face longer and more oval than most Tibetans. . . . His head was shaven, as becomes a priest, but he had long, pointed moustaches, which he had learned in India to wax. He was a man who was obviously accustomed to be regarded as a god, and who, more-

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over, had a firm belief in his own divinity, and yet there was a great quietness, and even modesty, about his manner. He had not the delicate, half-mystical appearance which characterizes the Tashi Lama of Shigatze. He is much more a man of the world, a careful observer of human nature and a shrewd conjecturer of ulterior motives. His personal life is above suspicion. He is rigid in his celibacy and in his abstinence from wine and tobacco. His food is simple, and his dress on ordinary occasions scarcely to be distinguished from that of an ordinary monk. He prefers to reside as much as possible in his villa of Norbu Linga, another mile beyond the city, instead of living in state, attended with pomp and ceremony, in the Potala, one of the most magnificent palaces in the world. Yet he is obviously concerned with the world's affairs. He is ambitious in a cool, calculating way, ever seeking to unify his power and to weaken opposition.

"In his youth his violent temper frequently led him to commit some rash or foolish act, but the trials and tribulations of exile and deposition have taught him greater caution, one might almost say craftiness. He is afraid to commit himself to a policy without seeing what its effect will be. He would be the last person to claim occult powers for himself and his intelligence is not gigantic. Fine points of metaphysics and theology he leaves to others, but he is possessed of a great deal of acumen and acuteness. Above all, he is blessed with the faculty of being able to choose wisely his human instruments.

"Suspecting—and doubtless learning from hearsay of the fate of his predecessors—the present Dalai Lama,

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when he approached the age of majority (eighteen years) studiously avoided eating food that was not first tasted by his attendants, and in other ways shrewdly escaped running into danger."

On reaching the age of eighteen he had insisted upon claiming the power that was nominally his. Rashly, with this power in his hands, he had aroused the hostility of Great Britain and China, by his apparent friendliness with Russia. The British Mission of 1904 was the result.

Tibet was open and the way to Mount Everest clear, but it was not until sixteen years after the departure of the British Mission that permission to attempt the ascent of the mountain was politically possible. As early as 1893, a proposal to ascend Everest was made, but exciting times on the frontiers and the exigencies of the Service prevented its maturing. The next attempt was discussed in 1907. It was not to be, however, since Lord Morley, the then Secretary of State, was averse from an expedition entering Tibet, as being contrary to a recently signed Treaty with Russia. But Sir Francis Younghusband and his fellows of the Royal Geographical Society had hungry eyes on the summit of Everest. So, in 1920 Sir Howard Bury was sent to India to lay their proposals before the Viceroy. He did so with such persuasiveness that Mr. Bell, the British Agent in Lhasa was instructed to ask from the Tibetan Government permission for an expedition to explore the mountain. This was granted and early in the following year the Royal Geographical Society and the Alpine Club began to organize the expedition.

SECTION II TO THE MOUNTAIN

I

VERY little was then known about the gigantic mountain, straddling Colossus-like between the forbidden lands of Tibet and Nepal. White men had never been nearer to it than forty miles. Approach was impossible from the southern, or Nepalese side, and difficulties in the way of approach from the northern (Tibet) side were known to be tremendous: a country sparsely populated, practically roadless and more dangerous to explorers than any other mountain region in the world.

On the top of Everest a barometer, which at sea-level stands at 30 inches, would fall to only 9 inches, and the decrease of pressure compared with the ground level would be more than 10 lb. to the square inch, compared with $14\frac{3}{4}$ lb. In other words, the air over one square mile, which, at the earth's surface, weighs nearly 28,000,000 tons, would on the top of Everest weigh barely 8,000,000 tons.

In the middle of summer, with a ground temperature of 70 degrees Fahrenheit the thermometer, on the top of Everest, would probably fall to at least 40 degrees below zero Fahrenheit, or, 70 degrees of frost. High risks would have to be encountered on the great adventure, and severe hardships endured—risks from icy

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slopes, rocky precipices and avalanches on a scale unknown to even the hardiest of Alpine climbers; hardships from intense cold, terrific winds, blizzards, and greatest of all—the unknown factor of the capacity of the human body to stand great exertion at altitudes beyond those ever reached by man.

On the summit of Everest the body is supplied with only one-third of the usual amount of oxygen. Most people at 29,000 feet would become paralysed or unconscious under such conditions. But life and effort were possible at such heights by a process of acclimatization. The Duke of the Abruzzi, brother of the King of Italy, had reached 24,600 feet in the Himalayas; Mr. C. F. Meade's party had pitched tents at 23,500 feet on Mount Kamet, and passed a night there. Other trained mountaineers had been to heights from 23,000 to 24,000 feet in the Himalayas. There was no doubt that up to nearly 25,000 feet people could live and do a certain amount of work.

With picked and trained men, preferably between twenty-five and thirty-five years of age; with the weather remaining favourable, the summit of Everest, 4,000 feet higher than the highest point yet reached, should prove conquerable.

II

The reconnaissance expedition set out from Darjeeling in 1921 under Col. Howard Bury, an impressive cavalcade of climbers, porters, donkeys, yaks, ponies and mules, straggling through the passes towards the uplands of Tibet.

On the way Everest claimed her first victim—Dr.

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Kellas, one of the hardest and most experienced of Himalaya mountaineers. He was ill when they left Phari and had to be carried in an arm-chair by coolies. They crossed the Tang La Pass, 15,200 feet, and rode ten miles across the flat Tangpuensum Plain, its leagues of dry sand prinked with pink trumpet flowers. To the right of them Chomolhari reared its glittering crest of ice riven with precipices 7,000 feet deep.

On to Dochen and the Bamtsuo Lake, its shallow waters reflecting the chiaroscuro of the Tibetan landscape, purple, dark blue, green and red, and, upside down, a magic other-world of mirrored mountain-peaks and glacier, glittering, blue-streaked by crevasse, blue of the inverted sky. From Dochen, over the Dug Pass (16,400 feet), a dead valley with the ruins of a dead city in its midst—Khetam, which had flourished in the days before Tashilumpo was built.

They were in a lost world, wide, icy-chill, silent; its only signs of life the water-birds skimming the dream surface of the lake; the shy mountain gazelles that came and went like ghosts—toothsome ghosts albeit, when shot and potted—and a stray camp of nomads met with on the march. Nomads, and the strange community of holy women inhabiting the nunnery of Tatsang. Thirty wise virgins, tending their butter-lamps, turning their ~~eternal~~ prayer-wheels, waiting, shaven heads bowed in a trance of self-induced hypnosis, for release, reincarnation.

Kellas, in his litter, was looking forward to reaching Khampa Dzong, a day's march farther—the foot of the mountain. Bury pushed on towards that monastic citadel which towers upon its rock above the plain. The Jongpen (monastic-castellan) came down to greet

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them, bringing a present of five sheep and a hundred eggs. While Bury was exchanging courtesies with the Jongpen a messenger came running to say that Kellas had died while crossing the pass.

They buried him on one of the slopes below the fortress, within sight of Everest, which he was so eager to climb, within sight of the three great peaks—Pawkuni, Kinchenjow and Chomiomo, which he had already climbed. The coolies made a cross of the wild flowers that grow in the dry soil there, and so they left him among the mountains.

From Khampa Dzong the route lay sixteen miles across midge-infested marshy plains to Lingga, now within full sight of Everest and her sister peaks, thence, thirteen miles more to Tinki Dzong, fortress centre of a number of prosperous villages and monasteries surrounded by fields of barley. Thence, over the Tinki Pass (17,000 feet), and down to the gorse-carpeted Yaru Valley. They forded the river, ninety yards wide and three and a half feet deep, through a sandstorm, hurrying across the quivering quicksands on the other side and just before dark came to a place where a beautiful and lofty peak dominated the south-west.

The porters called it Chomouri, the “Goddess of the Turquoise Peak,” but, taking its bearings next morning, the travellers decided it must be Everest, now only, about fifty miles away. It stood alone now, separated from all other peaks, towering into the clear-blue morning sky, far surpassing all its neighbours in majesty and loftiness.

The surveyors had been busy en route taking observations of this unmapped land where Europeans had never been before. Already they had mapped

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25,000 square miles of new country. Now they were among the mountains proper, peak upon peak hurling their splendid spears aloft, an army massed for battle.

Yet, farther and high as they went, they found life there before them. Little communities, lay and monastic, the villages sheltering beneath the pinnacled Jong whose topmost tower was a Buddha shrine. Man, creeping humbly at the feet of the mountain; little communities folded in the Buddha-lap of Everest. Thebiades of the snows; lost monasteries fronting the glittering monstrance of the glacier; mute monks performing their totemic ritual of prayer and devil dance before that high altar. Dzong, Bhong, gong, their name endings, like the sound of the brazen gong beats in the temple's dim recesses.

There was a higher state of civilization in these remote communities than was to be found in the more sordid cities of the plains, and a surprising natural beauty in their setting. Kishong, surrounded by willow groves and a sea of buckthorn. Here was a valley, 15,000 feet high, massed deep with juniper and wild roses. The roses were cream coloured and sweet scented; every bush held hundreds of them and threw their fragrance in the air. Clear, bubbling springs laced silver threads between the rocks, and patches of vivid green grass spread carpets for the feet. Higher again came Shekai Dzong, with its monastery of 400 monks, perched on a conical hill.

The actual town stood at the base of the hill, the monastery, consisting of innumerable buildings and narrow streets, climbed upwards connected by walls and towers with the fort.

This again ran buttressed by turreted walls to a

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Gothic-like shrine on the summit where incense was offered to the deities.

The travellers pitched camp in a willow grove at the base of the hill. Crowds came to gaze upon them; strange white men from the other world beneath the clouds. Came the Jongpen with a gift of eggs and the courtesy of welcome. Feast of sweetmeat, macaroni, mince and junket; libations of buttered tea.

They presented him with an electric-torch. At first "it rather frightened him, but afterwards caused great astonishment and gave much pleasure."

They were invited to visit the monastery, being received by the official head appointed by the Lhasa Government. It was very dark in the main temple, and the air smelt strongly of rancid butter from the devotional lamps. "Several life-sized statues of Buddha were covered with precious stones and turquoises and behind them was a colossal figure of Buddha quite fifty feet high.

"Round about the temple," says Bury, "were eight curious figures, some ten feet high, dressed in quaint flounced dresses, which, I was told, were the eight guardians of the shrine. We then went up steep, slippery ladders, almost in complete darkness, until we came out on a platform opposite the gilded face of the Great Buddha. Here were offerings of grain and butter in great profusion and some most interesting pieces of carved silver, exquisitely worked, and also some curious old chain armour. We then went out into a kind of roof courtyard where we were given very buttery tea and sweetmeats."

Before leaving they called on the Abbot. He proved a charming old man, who had spent sixty-six years of

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his life in the monastery. He was worshipped by the monks as a reincarnation of the previous Abbots. He was most interested in the visitors and the purpose of their visit and he was persuaded to pose for a photograph, dressed in gold brocade, seated before a background of priceless silk hangings. They had heard about photographs in the monastery, but had never seen one. Bury promised to send them copies of the holy man's picture as soon as he could get them developed at Tingri.

Next day brought them to Tingri Dzong, which was to be their base for stores and supplies while reconnoitring the northern and north-western approaches of Everest. Tingri Dzong is a small trading town situated on an isolated hill in the middle of a great plain, which rises gradually to Mount Everest and the snow-capped chain of mountains from 25,000 to 27,000 feet high, forming the Tibet-Nepal boundary.

II

On June 23, Mallory and Bullock, two members of the expedition, left Tingri Dzong to reconnoitre the easiest method of approaching Everest from the north-west. George Leigh Mallory, schoolmaster, mountaineer, who three years later was to vanish on the mountain—last seen “going strongly for the top”—leaving the great question unanswered—“Did he succeed?”

With Mallory and Bullock went eighteen coolie porters and four yaks. Everest now confronting them spread her formidable defences of glacier and rushing

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streams across their path. Rickety bridges spanned the torrents for this was the way to Rongbuk where stands the last and greatest monastic outpost of Lamaism, the valley that ends in cul-de-sac of precipice and glacier. Thus far, and no farther, says the mountain. The Buddha-men, accepting this decree, had built their temple there upon the rocks. Some hundred monks and nuns in solitary cells, in caves and clefts, beneath the shadow of the mountain.

After a day or two spent in reconnaissance, the climbers found a spot some seven miles farther up the valley on a shelf of rock high above the left bank of the glacier. Here they established their first camp at a height of 18,000 feet, "for the combined purpose of training the coolies in snow and ice work, and of seeing whether there were any possible methods whereby they might get round the terrible precipice which descended an almost sheer 10,000 feet straight down to the Rongbuk Glacier."

Days passed in reconnoitring, the climbing of subsidiary peaks, the surveying of the unknown land, then at last, to England came the news that a route to the summit had been found by Mallory, Bullock and Wheeler.

They had reached the glacier below the North Col, wall of ice which connects Everest with her north peak, they had ascended the North Col, finding its knife-edge bridge to Everest quite possible, but a north-westerly gale lasting for four days and intense cold had driven them back.

There had been days of sleet and snow; days and nights of startling clearness when Everest and all her sister peaks stood out against the blue of the sky, ice

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cliffs sparkling white, steel-blue and purple in the shadows; mountain crests, tinged gold and crimson by dawn and sunset, silver in moonlight. And always, everywhere, an eternal stillness. Far below they could look down upon the sea of clouds covering Nepal and watch the lightning flash as gods might watch their thunderbolts.

And high above the storms of the plains they lived in that silent land, their fellow creatures the scarlet bunting, the redstart, grey wolf, stalking fox and hare; creatures tame in the sanctuary of these valleys where man had never been before.

But the question was still to be solved whether men could acclimatize themselves to the rarefied atmosphere at heights above 23,000 feet. Bury was by no means certain that the expedition under General Bruce would reach the top of Everest in 1922. Living at great heights lowered the vitality enormously, he pointed out, and most men suffered from sleeplessness.

“Nothing perhaps was so astonishing in the party of reconnaissance as the rapidity with which they became acclimatized and capable of great exertions between 18,000 and 21,000 feet. Where is the limit of this process? Will the multiplication of red corpuscles continue so that men may become acclimatized much higher? There is evidence enough to show that they may exist comfortably enough, eating and digesting hearty meals and retaining a feeling of vitality and energy up to 23,000 feet. It may be that, after two or three days quietly spent at this height, the body would sufficiently adjust itself to endure the still greater difference from normal atmospheric pressure 6,000 feet higher.”

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He found conditions trying enough after sleeping at an altitude of above 22,000 feet.

“We blessed the early morning sun when it appeared and began to unfreeze us. I noticed then that our faces and hands were all a curious blue colour. . . . With much difficulty Wheeler made us a little tea, which, if not drunk at once, froze, Mallory thawed out some sardines which had all been frozen solid.”

Freezing cold, burning heat. Mallory, describing a climb over the glacier, wrote:

“Our greatest enemy as we went on was not, after all, the deep, powdery snow. The racket sank slightly below the surface and carried a little snow each step as one lifted it. The work was arduous for the first man, but at a slow pace it was possible to plod on without undue exertion. The heat was a different matter. In the glacier furnace the thin mist became steam, it enveloped us with a clinging garment from which no escape was possible, and far from being protected by it from the sun’s fierce heat, we seemed to be scorched all the more because of it. The atmosphere was enervating to the last degree; to halt, even for a few minutes, was to be almost overwhelmed by inertia, so difficult it seemed, once the machinery had stopped and lost momentum, to heave it into motion again.”

SECTION III

THE FIRST ASSAULT

I

WITHIN a year Mallory, Somervell and Norton, of the second Everest expedition, reached a height of 26,800 feet, without oxygen. This was the expedition led by General C. G. Bruce. It was a strange caravan that straggled up the passes from Darjeeling—thirteen mountaineers, sixty native porters and 320 transport animals. They reached the Rongbuk Glacier with complete outfit and stores from England, and then began the first determined attack on the mountain.

Three camps had to be established on the East Glacier, first where the East and Main Rongbuk Valleys sweeping downwards from the mountain, join at an altitude of 17,800 feet, the second, on the left bank of the East Rongbuk Glacier, 19,800 feet high, and four hours' journey from the first, the third, near the foot of the North Col, 21,000 feet, and four and a half hours from Camp II.

Between these camps they had to struggle through areas of loose, shaly slope, across moraines and down on to the glacier itself. The ice was hard and black as steel, split and splintered by crevasses, treacherous, with its covering of freshly fallen snow. But climbers and porters struggled on heavily laden to the advanced

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base on a cirque of snow beneath the North Col and there Camp III was established.

They advanced like an army, capturing and consolidating positions, opening lines of communication. Each camp was complete with stores of food and equipment. Camp III had enough provision for ten climbers and a large number of porters, full alpine kit, medical stores and the cumbersome oxygen plant. It all went up on the backs of the hardy little porters without whose aid the expedition could not have advanced. They carried the oxygen higher still—to 25,000 feet, without using it, and there a camp was established from which Mallory, Morshead, Somervell and Norton set out on the first effort to reach the summit. Mallory and Somervell went ahead, cutting the steps in the great white wall of ice towards the North Col ridge, fixing a Jacob's Ladder of rope up which the laden porters could climb. The race now was against time and the weather. On these sunless slopes temperatures of 9 degrees below zero were common. What warmth there was in the thin, glacial air, went when the mountain-peak eclipsed the sun at 3 p.m., and the icy breath of the west wind drove them to their tents for shelter. Below, in the valleys, the monsoon clouds were boiling. With the monsoon would come warmth, comparative, but moisture, snow and avalanche; death to those who lingered on the loosening slopes.

May 20, at 5 a.m., and Mallory was awakened by a shaft of sunlight on the tent. He got up to rouse the rest of the party. No sign of life from the porters' tent; he had to untie the fastenings with which it was hermetically sealed. Disappointment, delay. They

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were all ill, four of them seriously mountain-sick. Routed out, five of them recovered sufficiently in the fresh air to volunteer for further effort. More delay —breakfast. Tea and tinned spaghetti. But the spaghetti had been left out in the cold all night, instead of sharing the warmth of the sleeping-bags, and it had to be thawed out.

They hoped, in the two hours from 6 to 8 p.m., before the sun gained power and mountain lassitude drained their strength, that they would gain 1,500 feet, above the North Col, and, proceeding slowly, reach 26,000 feet. They were an hour late in starting. The early morning sunshine was deceptive. There was no warmth in it. Plunging onwards they found themselves stopping to kick their toes against the rocks and beat freezing fingers. The ridge of rock ended and it became obvious that to advance they must cut steps in the ice. The proper way to do this, Mallory wrote, is to give one blow with the ice-axe and then stamp the foot into the hole just made; but such a blow requires a man's full strength and he must kick hard into the hole. A few hundred feet of such work had exhausted them and they were glad to rest at noon, sheltered under the rocks at about 25,000 feet.

The porters had to be sent back before they got frostbitten, but before they went they constructed a wall of snow on which one of the tents could be pitched. Mallory and Norton, less expert in this device, pitched their tent on a slab of rock and spent a wretched night, mummified with cold, and wakeful with the effort to keep from rolling down the slope to annihilation.

Snow and hail had fallen during the night. Three of Mallory's fingers were frostbitten; one of Norton's

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ears was thrice its normal size, and Morshead was too ill to go any farther. The others went on without him. Progress was very slow, effort, they found, depended on lung capacity. Mallory experimented with deep breathing, adapting his movement to its rhythm, and found the expedient successful. They knew, of course, that they would get nowhere near the summit of the mountain; they knew they must return to the camp before darkness fell. The aneroid registered 26,800 feet when they decided to turn. Morshead was at the 25,000 feet camp waiting for them. Snow had obliterated the track along the North Col edge. Fatigue and inertia bemused them. A slip, and three of them were hanging by the rope secured around a single ice-axe. Face downwards, their own ice-axes biting into the hard snow, they crawled upwards again towards the ledge, and lay there till heart, lungs and nerves were normal. It was now a race against darkness. All traces of the steps they had cut on the way upward were gone. They had to repeat the slow, exhausting process of step-cutting. Mallory went in advance, Norton following, supporting Morshead, who was almost at the limit of his resources. Somervell acted as rear-guard. The sun had set and the mountains were black with malice. Lightning stabbed the gloom and still beneath them was the North Col and the steep uncertain descent to Camp III.

A candle lit their footsteps down the mountain. The stars overhead now. The grim crevasse-riven glacier slope had to be traversed. Somervell produced a lantern from his rucksack, a lantern and a stub of candle. They huddled round with a box of matches

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and after one or two attempts the little flame had caught. By its light they groped in the dark and came to the edge of a cliff. How deep? Fifteen feet, they estimated, snow at the bottom. One by one they jumped. The snow held. Now for the ropes—if they could find them beneath the snow—the ropes that would guide them down to the terrace where the tents set. They groped along a precipice edge. The candle had gone out and in the darkness all they knew was that they were going downwards. Yes, but was that the way down?

At last the rope was found. They knew then that they could reach the tents. They did and crept into sleeping-bags after a “meal” of tinned jam and tinned milk mixed porridgewise with snow. Nauseating mixture—to them ambrosia, so frozen and fatigued their bodies were, hungering for sweet things, sugary balms for the exhausted blood.

Those of you who went through the Great War may remember similar debauches in like circumstances; coming down the line, light-headed, disembodied through weariness, sustained only by the thought that on the morrow you could lie in the filth of the billet floor and have a “drunk” of condensed milk; hole in the bottom, hole in the top of the tin, and you sucked it, glug-glug, like an egg. Tin of fruit, the juice soaking into the parched membranes of your desiccated body; slobbery mess of porridge, mixed with marmalade, dixie-full of burning hot tea; cup of rum, and—oblivion.

Descending next day to Camp III, they met three other members of the expedition, George Finch, Captain Geoffrey Bruce and Dr. Wakefield on their way

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up, carrying oxygen cylinders. They were making for the 27,200 feet level with the determination to reach the summit. They failed in this, but they reached 200 feet higher than the first party. Finch and Bruce, with one Gurkha orderly, camped for two nights at 25,000 feet, finally attaining the 27,000 feet ledge, without using oxygen.

II

The monsoon was approaching and there was no time for delay. The climbers had found the way up the mountain; they had stood within 2,000 feet of the plumed summit; one final effort and they might snatch the prize, then home in triumph. It was decided to make a third effort to reach the top.

Then death struck. Everest bided her time; loosed an avalanche, and wiped seven of them out of existence with one blow. Several of the party, including Morshead, had already been compelled to return to Darjeeling for frostbite treatment. Norton and Captain Bruce, exhausted by their great effort, had to descend to a lower altitude, away from the camps. Six men were left for the final effort. The party, with Mallory, Somervell and Finch in command, left the Base Camp on June 3. Weather was threatening and it grew worse. Snow fell for the next thirty-six hours. On arriving at Camp I, Finch was unable to continue and had to return to Base Camp. The others went on through the snow to Camp III, at the foot of the North Col. It was understood that the effort should only be made if the weather made it possible. They spent a dismal night at Camp III, and then came

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the morning of June 6, a day of glorious sunshine, the whole mountain white-sheeted before them, inviting; no breath of wind. They rested that day and prepared for the morrow. At 8 a.m., Mallory, Somervell and Crawford started up the slope of the North Col, step-cutting. The Col was in good condition, the snow firm and giving good foothold. Behind them, as they made the pathway came the laden coolies, fourteen of them, on three ropes, carrying the food and oxygen apparatus. They were half-way up, traversing a gentle slope, elated by their luck in finding such a day, when the snow split, right across the face of the Col. No warning: no time to think even: just an ominous "crack" and they were sliding, slowly, helplessly, with the avalanche towards the lip of the precipice. The three leaders had thrown themselves face downwards, ice-axes dug into the slipping surfaces, the steel teeth seeking a hold in the ice beneath.

What happened then no one knew. There came the rending and crashing of the great snow masses, engulfing them like ocean waves; the swift rush towards destruction, tug on the ropes which told the axe points were holding, suffocating chaos of white, and muffled thunder of the avalanche bursting on the glacier beneath. Silence.

They crawled slowly upwards from the precipice edge where the avalanche wave had left them stranded and looked around. Further below on the edge of an ice-cliff, some small black figures were moving. Regardless of their own danger the three leaders descended to the cliff. It was sixty feet high, and looking over the edge they could see a great crevasse at its base. Those on the cliff edge had managed to hold, the

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others—two rope parties of porters—had been swept into the crevasse and buried deep beneath the mounded snow.

As quickly as they could all the survivors now made their way down to the crevasse and tore with freezing hands at the snow. They were able to rescue three men. The others were buried deep in the crevasse beyond hope of rescue alive.

But the bodies had to be found. Hour after hour the rescued worked and in the end they had recovered all but one man—all dead.

So ended the first attempt to conquer Everest. The expedition was abandoned, but not the plans for the conquest of the grim mountain.

In the two years following the failure a new expedition, again commanded by Brigadier-General Bruce, was organized, and left England early in 1924 for Darjeeling. Major Norton was second in command, and among the personnel were George Leigh-Mallory and a new member, a young man not long down from Oxford.

These two, with N. E. Odell, of the Imperial College of Science, were fated to play the grimmest roles in the drama of the mountain, Odell as spectator of the tragedy.

“The doom of Everest is sealed,” wrote Sir Francis Younghusband on the eve of the expedition’s going forth. “Everest fights stoutly and with many terrible weapons . . . but she fights blindly, she cannot learn by experience and she cannot rise to the occasion; and she is opposed by an adversary who has all these advantages over her. The armour of Everest is seemingly perfect, but man has discovered one tiny chink,

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and through it is warily forcing his way. He finds means to outwit the mountain's allies. And each throw he receives only heightens his spirit. He quickly recovers himself, and, undaunted, returns to the battle. While the mountain for ever remains fixed, the spirit of man can heighten itself—can rise higher and higher as the battle demands and occasion requires. . . . Thus the doom can be seen relentlessly closing on Everest. Man is remorselessly marching upon her."

For him who first climbed to the apex of the Earth the apocalyptic vision :

"Kingdoms, principalities, and powers far down below will lie submerged in bluey haze. Raised high above the rest of the earth he will feel himself to be (one with) and to have reached a region of sternest austerity . . . loftier, purer, clearer, and of more dazzling radiance than man had ever known before. And ever after as man looks upward at Mount Everest it will not be with a craven sense of his own littleness beside her. He will then be justly proud of his own greatness. Supremely lofty as she is among all mountains, he will know for certain that his own spirit can exalt him higher still. And he will have nothing but unsullied love for his mighty foe. She may have shown him no mercy in the struggle. But she will have forced from out of him what, except for her, he would scarcely have known that he possessed. . . . Higher courage, more splendid daring, a firmer will and sharper wit he will have had to display.

"That is the reward which Everest can confer. . . . What he did on Mount Everest he will strive to do in every other sphere. . . ."

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Mallory had said: "Is it humanly possible to reach the summit of Everest? We have not a single convincing argument to solve that problem. I felt somehow, when we reached the North Col, that the task was not impossible; but that may only have been a delusion based on the appearance of the mountain from that point; it looks much smaller than it is. . . . I believe it to be possible, at all events, for unladen mountaineers to reach 26,000 feet, and if they can go up so far without exhaustion, I fancy the last 3,000 feet will not prove so very much more tiring as to exclude the possibility of their reaching the summit. . . .

"A party of two arriving at the top, each so tired that he is beyond helping the other, might provide good copy for the press, but the performance would provoke the censure of reasonable opinion. . . . Any reckoning, I believe, which fairly weighs the conditions and circumstances governing such an enterprise can only come to the conclusion that the chances in favour of success for any particular party are small indeed."

SECTION IV

TWO GO TO DEATH

I

ONE secret Everest holds, and no man, even he who at last tears aside the veil that shrouds the mystery of her eyes, will read the answer in that grim, sphinx-like face.

Mallory and Irvine. What did you do with them that night in June, 1924? God, or Goddess, thing of stone, give a sign. They conquered you and stood, where I stand now, one breathless moment snatched from time, knowing that night was nigh and that death was creeping forward in the darkness of the abyss beneath, yet risking all for the ecstasy of triumph, fear sublimated in achievement.

They did conquer, didn't they, then set about to face the journey back, those two strange, muffled figures, groping like insects over ice and ledge, slowly, carefully, for now the dark beleagured them.

Below was Odell waiting for their return. What a tale they had to tell him. The way was not far, 2,000 feet or so. If the weather held. It must.

Then the blizzard. Fury of the frozen hell unleashed against them, tearing at their fumbling fingers, blinding them, blotting out the feeble flicker of consciousness in benumbed brains.

A slip and a shout in the dark, unheard amid the

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storm welter, as well unuttered, for of what avail? Wrench at the rope and a desperate man, body face downwards, axe biting the ice, all his weight, all the weight of the other on the dangling rope hanging on that fragile tooth of steel. The bleeding hands gripping it, until they were wrenched away.

Another cry of despair in the dark, or maybe manhood's mute acceptance of death, the lost hands now pressed before the eyes to shut out the awful vision of the black abyss.

And the ice-axe bounding and slithering down the slope towards the ledge where it was found nine years later.

Was that how Mallory and Irvine conquered, and lost? Tell me Everest.

Silence.

Nobody knows. Many mountaineers are convinced that Mallory and Irvine did reach the summit and died in the darkness, on the way down. N. E. Odell, the geologist of the expedition, who accompanied them on their attempt, and remained behind in Camp V, at 25,000 feet, last saw them moving fast, at a point determined by theodolite as 28,227 feet up, less than 1,000 feet from the summit—a world's record in climbing.

That was at 12.50 on the afternoon of June 6—much too late for safety, but Odell, noting the alacrity with which the two climbers were moving, concluded that they were risking the remaining hours of daylight in a final effort to reach the peak by 4 p.m., returning to camp before complete darkness descended upon the mountain. The final ridge is bare rock with no apparent technical difficulties for mountain-climbers

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of the calibre of Mallory and Irvine. Mallory knew the mountain well. It had beaten him before. This time victory was within his grasp. He had reached the highest point then reached by man, but a few steps more and the prize was his. Had he doubted the possibility of success on this occasion he would have returned to camp. The argument is that he went on.

Unless, of course, it was that Irvine and he were lost between the hours when Everest dropped the curtain of cloud between them and the watching eyes of Odell, sole spectator of the drama played upon that mighty stage.

This third expedition to Everest was, in the beginning, led by General C. G. Bruce; later, at the time of the disaster, by Lieut.-Colonel Norton, General Bruce having abandoned active leadership on account of ill-health. In addition to the leaders, it included George Leigh-Mallory and Dr. T. Howard Somervell, who, together with Lieut.-Colonel Norton had, two years earlier, broken the world's mountaineering record with a climb of 26,985 feet, only to be out-topped by that of Captain Geoffrey Bruce, officer of a Gurkha regiment (and now with the expedition) who, with practically no previous experience of snow-climbing, reached a height of 27,200 feet.

These were the "old hands," to whom were added six new recruits—no awkward squad, but recruits in the sense that Alps and Arctic peaks and wastes had been their training ground. Fit training for a Himalaya adventure where climbing begins at heights where the Alps leave off. Mount Blanc's 15,782 feet spear-head thrust at space would be but foothold for some Lamasery in the Himalaya wild.

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Among the “recruits” who have whetted baby ice-axes on lesser peaks and now hope that theirs may be the thrill to stand tiptoe, or likelier, to lie spent, sprawling belly first upon the apex of the world, a clutching speck on the fringe of space, we shall note but two as fated to play leading roles in the drama.

N. E. Odell, of the Imperial College of Science, geologist, more eager, perhaps, to chip a flint from the vast, uphoven pyramid and find a fossil that once crawled sluggishly in primal ooze full many fathoms deep when Everest was ocean-bed.

A. C. Irvine, of Shrewsbury and Merton College, Oxford—so they described him—who two years before had rowed two for Oxford in the University Boat Race and had since been with Odell on an expedition to Spitzbergen, his baptism of ice, in preparation for the great adventure so soon to follow—perhaps the greatest that any living man can claim.

Young—in the early twenties—strong as a horse, and as willing—fearless, without fatigue, he was the very stuff of which the mountaineer-explorer is made.

He was the “experiment” of the expedition, the “baby,” and at first the older men had doubted the wisdom of exposing one of his tender years to the rigours of Tibetan travel and mountaineering. But the strength of his youth was a Siegfried’s sword that brought him scathless, if enchanted, through fever, forest, swamp and death-infested valley; heat that turns men’s blood to water, cold that chills it to ice in the veins, always cheerful, ever-ready, disciplined, to that glorious moment, when, above the snowline, he knew that the great choice had fallen to him—he,

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the youngest, with Mallory, the hardened one—to make the final test.

What luck! What fun! Danger? Not a bit of it. Not if one kept a cool head. That final peak there, gleaming in the sun, only 2,000 feet above, a mere crag-climb; stiff going, of course, but nothing in it now, with the jolly old oxygen apparatus. Five steps upwards, and a pause for breath, thin, familiar trickle of oxygen in the nostrils; tug on the rope, Mallory, above, looking down, goggled, grotesque, giving the signal. Another five steps, each foothold chipped from the flinty ice. Carefully, one, two three. . . . Like going up a ladder, making the rungs as you go.

Pity they couldn't talk. "I say. . . . You all right?"

"Yes."

"Great sport, isn't it?"

Could imagine old Mallory's face behind the mask, bearded, smiling, eyes glittering with triumph.

"Soon be at the top. Almost there. Slowly . . ."

Top of the World. . . . "Sitting on top of the world. . . ." Would they sit, or stand. Must stand; heave up carefully, so as not to overbalance on account of the oxygen apparatus on one's back; not much room in any case. What would it be like? A peak, a pinnacle, a few yards wide, slippery, treacherous. There must be no mistakes. Grasp hands in silence, masked face looking into masked face. "We've done it, old man." Leave some symbol as sign for the next man up. Then a nod. Down again, old man. I'll go first. Careful. Slowly. It's getting dark. Mustn't exult. Think only of the next step, and the one after that; toe-holds in the ice. One, two, three, four.

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Then wait, axe dug well in, holding. Getting dark. You all right? Shake on the rope. One, two three, four. Pause.

Old Odell, waiting down there at camp, wondering what's happened. Won't he be pleased? Mallory's hobnailed boots above. Can still see them, foreshortened, enormous, lunging down, feeling, fitting securely into the steps, dislodging little particles of ice. It was worth it. We'll get there all right before night falls. Stretch out in the tent on the ridge, take off the masks and talk. Not much, because very tired. Hot drink. Sleep. But afterwards. Base Camp. England . . . lectures . . . a book.

Mustn't think. The slippery rock slabs now, more difficult than ice. Have to feel for foothold and crevice to clutch the fingers in. Like clambering down a slate roof. Darker now; the last faint gleam of light, dim as a candle, gone out of the sky, sudden blackness and pitiless lash of sleet. Odell waiting. Just one step more. Down, down, into the eternal dark.

II

"We expect no mercy from Everest," a few days before the disaster in his account of the expedition's failure in the second assault on the summit. "The issue will shortly be decided. The third time we walk up East Rongbuk Glacier will be the last, for better or for worse."

Prophetic words, in which we read challenge and a determination to overcome previous failures on an expedition which had had more than its share of ill-luck and frustration. He was a grim climber,

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George Leigh-Mallory, aged thirty-six, married, former master at Charterhouse, one of the greatest rock and mountain-climbers in Great Britain. A man of outstanding abilities in many ways, who had given his whole soul to this task in hand—the conquest of Everest, from whom he expected no mercy, and in the end received none.

It has been told how he took a distinguished part in the first reconnaissance expedition of Everest in 1921, and was chosen in the following year to take part in the grand assault on the summit. On that occasion he broke all previous records in climbing by leading a party, without any artificial aid from oxygen, to a height of 26,800 feet.

On his final climb with Irvine, he was accompanied by Odell and their coolie porters as far as the North Col Camp (23,000 feet) where Odell was established in support, a lone sentinel between the party at the lower bases and the climbers who would make the essay, doctor, cook (with melted snow) and one-man rescue party, should the need arise, as it did when he magnificently played his part, as shall be told. Testing their oxygen apparatus, Mallory and Irvine had made the ascent from Camp III, 2,000 feet below the North Col camp, in two and a half hours, joining Odell there, flushed with success and eager to go on. The weather was good and everything pointed to an early triumph. On June 6, they were up early, ready to push forward. Breakfast of fried sardines—strange foods that stay the body and satisfy the soul's craving of the high-altitude mountaineer—and off they set, joyfully, for Camp V, 2,000 feet above. Five porters went with them carrying reserves of food and oxygen. One night

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there and they were to push on to Camp VI (27,000 feet) which Norton and Somervell had established a few days before. Odell followed to Camp V, his place on the North Col being taken by Hazard, another member of the expedition.

Camp V, a little rock ledge on the brink of nowhere, from which he was to watch the drama now unfolding in its grand and awful setting of the Himalaya amphitheatre, peak upon peak, cloud piercing, cloud-capped, the vast, writhen sea of ice pinnacle and fractured rock, gaunt, glittering, prismatic, opalescent, beneath the changing play of light. Before him Everest's last frowning precipice, gloomy and menacing, the light behind her flooding the far-off plains of Tibet where one great rival peak showed isolated, unknown.

Transcendent vision of a Himalaya sunset, seen from the roof of the world, pink, yellow, ochre, umber, as crest after crest caught the sun's declining rays, and refracted them in million tints from fluted precipice of ice columns, glittering glacier shields, sabre-toothed summits, blood-red, cruel. Loveliest and most cruel of them all, the snowy top of Kanchenjunga, Everest's sister peak, afloat like some magic cloud-island in that iridescent sea of light.

Night came and the watcher sought the shelter of his tiny tent, for night on the mountain is a period of black nothingness akin to death through which man passes safely only in the chrysalis-like comfort of a sleeping-bag.

Those other two, asleep within their pupa coverings, 2,000 feet above, awaiting, wakeful doubtless, the coming of the day. Had they too watched the splendid

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sunset, turning from it anon to front the glooming, altar face of Everest on whose last steps they were to climb? With resolution, certitude, hope or fear? Who knows what were their inner thoughts, or if they even talked about the morrow at such a height, in such a place, where even talk is weariness and waste of effort that must be conserved.

Probably no more was said, if anything, than the Englishman's laconic "Marvellous!" in face of the sublime.

"Yes, rather wonderful. Better turn in now, don't you think? Looks hopeful for to-morrow."

"Rather!"

Slow adjustment of tent flap and sleeping-bags; all movement slowed down to avoid fatigue.

A few words about the waking, "breakfast," the setting out.

"Are you all right, old man?"

"Yes, thanks; are you?"

"Perfectly. Good night, old boy."

"Good night. Happy dreams."

"Don't oversleep."

"No fear. Cheero!"

III

Odell was out early next morning. He had work to do after his own heart, a geological survey of the mountain, as wide as possible, between Camp V (where he was) and Camp VI, which Mallory and Irvine had doubtless left by now on their climb. It was a cold morning but not too cold for such an altitude. Odell was alone, and glad of it. His two

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porters had complained of headache and he had seized the excuse to send them down to Camp IV at the North Col.

Now for a lovely time, alone on the mountain, scrambling among the rocks of the knife-back ridge, knocking chips out of the face of Time in search of the imprint of the squamous primal thing that died in ocean slime long æons before man was, æons, maybe, before Everest was tossed a lava wave towards the moon in some great Earth's convulsion.

Bit of a nuisance that the weather had changed. Great banks of cloud were forming, casting a gloom across the mountain-slopes, but the wind was light. There were little scurries of sleet and snow at intervals. Still, nothing to worry about. Between squalls, he looked upwards and saw a glow of light at the higher altitudes. Sunshine up there. Mallory and Irvine must be well above the mist by now.

Then he found what he was in search of, and his heart leapt with jubilation—the first definite fossils on Everest. He looked upwards in his jubilation to find that the mist had cleared. Summit, ridge and final peak of Everest were unveiled, and there before him, on a snow-crest just beneath the base of the final pyramid a tiny black speck moved. Breathless he watched and saw another speck of blackness move across the field of white, upwards to join the first upon the ridge. The first then moved towards the great rock step, vanished, then reappeared on the top of the step. It paused while the other speck joined it. Then the cloud-curtain fell again and the vision vanished.

It was 12.50. Late. Mallory had hoped to reach that point several hours earlier. There was no doubt

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in Odell's mind at the time that the tiny specks climbing like flies upon that last step of the pyramid were Mallory and Irvine. Moving quickly; that was apparent even at such a distance. They had been detained somehow, probably by the mist, and were now going strong for the top, realizing that they had but a few hours of daylight in which to reach the summit and return to Camp VI at nightfall. Conditions must have been bad up there. But now the rest would be comparatively easy. The rock face of the final pyramid, seen through binoculars, presented no apparent technical difficulties for experienced climbers. They should do it now by 4 p.m., at the least, then back to camp while the light still held. Pity though they were so late. What could have happened?

Still, no use worrying about it. One must wait. And there was work to be done.

Odell continued up to Camp VI taking with him provisions for the returning climbers. He had some difficulty in finding the camp—one small mountain-tent, perched on a ledge beneath a rock-step. And now a blizzard had set in. He stacked the provisions in the tent and stayed there sheltering a while, thinking, wondering. The blizzard? Then, he thought, I'd better go out towards the peak as far as possible, in case they should turn back and need help. Bitterly cold and the blizzard driving with fury. Head foremost he drove through it, pausing now and then, hands cupped over his mouth, hullooing.

“Hallo there. . . . Hallo! Halloo-oo-oo!”

Whistling.

The wind snatched the weak cry from his lips and tossed it derisively aside.

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“Haloo-oo-oo!”

The hurricane could out-haloo him.

“Whee-ee-ee!”

“Whee-ee-ee,” mocked the shrieking wind, whistling about his ears.

Of course, it was useless. They would be beyond hearing, even if they were returning. In any case, the chances were that they were above the blizzard, in sunshine, waiting till it blew over. As it did, within two hours, leaving the whole north face of the mountain gleaming in the late light of sunset.

Surely they must be on the way down now? Odell, searching the upper crag with sleet-seared eyes, could see no sign of life. Yes, what was that? Only the shadow of a cloud, a trick of light. Nothing. And now the night came.

He, alone in the darkness, could do no more that night. By previous arrangement he returned to North Col Camp, and, with Hazard, kept vigil until a late hour for any sign of life in the higher camps; a gleam of light. No sign.

Out early next morning, with field-glasses scanning the distant Camp VI. Nothing there; no sign of movement. Of course, it was quite possible that they had returned late and were still asleep. Midday, and still no sign of life at the camp.

Something must be done about it. Odell decided to ascend again to Camp V, stay the night, and go on next morning to Camp VI. They might be there inside the tent, exhausted, unable to move, broken limbs, perhaps, due to some mishap on the way down. But they were not there.

He spent a cold and wakeful night in the little tent

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at Camp V, alone again, his two porters, fearing to face the revelation of the morning and pleading the sick-headache excuse which would give them the safety of the lower camp—not that grim, little black tent on the ledge above which the gods had struck in their wrath.

Morning, and Odell left on his last journey to the tent which he had left only two days previously and from which Mallory and Irvine had set out on the morning of their climb. He was loaded with oxygen apparatus and carried a store of provisions for the benighted men, just in case—one never knew.

But he did know. They all knew now. Silence at the tent. No answering “Hallo, there,” as he approached. Emptiness inside, when he knelt and pulled aside the flap. Nothing touched; it was just as he had left it there two days ago. They had not been there. He dumped his load inside and started grimly out in vain search of some trace of them, climbing upwards, the way they must have gone, working out along the face, a slow, laborious, heart-breaking task. Hopeless, hopeless. The vast mountain-face, inimical, enigmatic, gave no sign of where they were. He could go no farther; do no more. The day was going and a stir of menace in the air told of storm brooding. Back to Camp VI and he signalled, with sleeping-bags laid out in the snow, to Hazard, down at the North Col Camp: “No trace of them; am coming down.”

First close the tent with the few poor relics of their occupation still inside it; the wind now tearing at its frail structure as though to efface all memory of them, then down the north ridge, Everest’s unleashed

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wrath about him, hiding, insect-like, behind rocks, from the bitter swords of the wind, the spears and arrows of sleet, the dread, death-clutch of frostbite. In his mind, benumbed with sorrow and fatigue, one recurring thought, to keep the flicker of life aglow. At North Col Camp, there's warmth, and comfort, hot soup, sleep and forgetfulness.

In his own account of those last moments at Camp VI Odell has given a picture of the almost hypnotic spell that Everest puts upon her votaries, the strange lure that draws them back again and again, even in face of death, to pit their puny strength against her awful might, their wit or cunning against her implacable will.

“Closing up the tent and leaving its contents as my friends had left them, I glanced up at the mighty summit above me. It seemed to look down with cold indifference on me and howl derision in wind gusts at my petition to yield up its secret, this mystery of my friends. If it were indeed the sacred ground of Chomolunga—Goddess Mother of the Mountains—had we violated it? Was I now violating it? And yet, as I gazed again there seemed to be something alluring in that towering presence; I was almost fascinated. I realized that no mere mountaineer alone could but be fascinated; that he who approaches close must ever be led on, and, oblivious of all obstacles, seek to reach that most sacred and highest place of all. It seemed that my friends must have been thus enchanted also; or why else should they tarry? In an effort to suppress my feelings, I turned my gaze downwards to the North Col far below, and I remembered that other of my companions would be anxiously awaiting

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my return, eager to hear what tidings I carried. Alone and in meditation I slowly commenced my long descent."

Next day, he and Hazard evacuated North Col Camp and the other camps in succession down to the Base on East Rongbuk Glacier.

IV

The expedition was abandoned and then began a controversy, which still goes on, around the fate of Mallory and Irvine, Odell's vision and the great question—did they reach the summit before they died, or did they slip and fall to death during the ascent?

Colonel Norton was inclined to accept the theory that they had reached the summit; so were other members of the expedition. But for lack of further evidence than Odell's view of the two black specks moving over the snowfield towards the pyramid step, the question must remain unanswered. One ingenious theory advanced was that Odell was mistaken in believing the two black specks, moving fast across the snow, to be Mallory and Irvine. What he saw was two birds—Himalayan choughs—flying in mid-air, and seen thus from a distance of four miles, creating the illusion in his mind of the two climbers making a belated dash for the summit.

Begging the question of the possibility of any bird-life (even Himalayan choughs) inhabiting those frigid, tenuous airs, it is interesting to note that the theory rather favours the belief that Mallory and Irvine succeeded. Choughs have a habit of following human beings. They had been seen at lower altitudes

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on the mountain. Therefore, the two black specks, if birds they were, were following the climbers, at a distance. Mallory and Irvine were not late, they were well ahead, out of sight of Odell, maybe already almost at the summit. A mountaineer of Mallory's experience, it is argued, knowing himself to be four hours late, and knowing that to be benighted meant death, would not have passed on to the summit from the point seen by Odell, but would have turned back.

The finding of the ice-axe by members of the 1933 Everest Expedition, just below the "first step," set at rest all doubts as to whether the climbers got so far, but proves nothing else. The axe was later identified as Mallory's.

The problem has been narrowed down to three possibilities by Dr. T. H. Somervell:

(1) Either Mallory or Irvine slipped, and the other, to hold him with the rope, laid down his axe, or possibly dropped it in the process. Normally, he would recover it after the accident was averted; but it was never recovered, so, if this is the way the axe came to be on the ledge, it must mark the scene of the fatal accident by which both lost their lives.

(2) The axe may have been left behind as being an encumbrance to the climbing of difficult rocks.

The 1933 expedition was of the opinion that the rocks on the ridge presented considerable difficulty in certain places, one of these places being the step below which the axe was found.

If this was the case, the axe was left behind on the way *up* the mountain.

(3) The axe may have fallen from the ridge (and, under the severe conditions, been judged not to be

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worth recovering). This may have happened either on the way up or down the mountain.

So Everest keeps their secret, as she keeps their bones, giving them death and immortality, her whole vast monolith their cenotaph; the enigma of their fate for epitaph.

SECTION V

PHANTOMS OF THE MOUNTAIN

I

ONE day in September, 1921, a man toiling over a snow pass, 20,000 feet up Mount Everest, stopped short in his tracks and peered, unbelieving, at the ground before him.

In the soft snow was the imprint of a human foot—not the booted, spiked foot of mountaineer or coolie carrier, but a naked foot—large, splayed, mark where the toes had gripped the ground, dent where the heel had rested.

Of course, it was impossible. Some trick of the wind and drift snow, yet puzzling. The climber, Colonel Howard Bury, leader of the first expedition to Mount Everest, was a man well-versed in the ways of the mountain. He knew well the tracks of hare and fox and bird that can be found even at these heights, and had already marked such on his journey upwards from the camp at 20,000 feet, the spoor-print of the great red Himalayan bear, he also knew, how like it is to the print of the human foot. But this thing was different.

Bury and his companions inspected it long, the coolie porters crowding round, strangely silent.

“What is it?” they asked the porters, mountain-men of the mixed breeds who inhabit the foothills, and then there was an excited babel of response.

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"It is a Devil Man, sahib; one of the Meetoh Kangmi, the 'Abominable Snowman,' wild, hairy sahib; tall as a tree, fleet as the wind, savage as the jungle tiger. They are demons, sahib, they and their women, they eat the flesh of men, and can kill the yak with one blow."

"Oh, very interesting. Ever seen one?"

"Not I, sahib, not I; but it is well known that they live in the mountains, hiding in the jungle with the wild beasts of whom they have no fear, in the gorges and the secret valleys to which no man has ever penetrated. My wife will tell you of a man of her people who had an encounter with one many years ago. There are many such tales of them in every land along the Himalaya. Is it not so, you from Nepal, you from Sikkim, you from Tibet. You see, sahib."

To every mountain its divinity or demon; such legendary is part of the race inheritance of mankind—the gods on Olympus, the trolls and hobgoblins of Scandinavian myth, the Wee Folks of the dark Highland hills. The gods have gone from Olympus now and taken sanctuary in Mr. James Stephens's other Ireland, Apollo with the halo of singing birds about his flashing mane of gold—registered, like a good citizen, with the Irish Free State Department of Mythology as Angus-Og; Pan tootling his pipes on the slopes of Slieve Gallion to lure good Catholic shepherd-girls into nudist dance cantrips among the innocent flocks. Mercury has become a B.B.C. announcer and publicity man for lady air-record breakers. Mars, following the modern mode, megaphones "Havoc" from the Palazzo Venezia and the Wilhelmstrasse; Aphrodite

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is a star in Hollywood; the nymphs and dryads have fled from grot and stream to sun-tan beach and roadhouse pool. And so on. . . .

Colonel Bury paid no more attention to his coolies' tales than to record the footprint evidence of this strange Man Friday of the mountain. But publication of the discovery brought further evidence as to the possibility of a race such as the coolies described inhabiting the lower reaches of the Himalaya and even ascending to heights where the explorer, masked, muffled and accoutred for war against the awful cold, is yet in hourly danger of death.

The returning coolies had no doubt about what they had seen. Small colonies of the Abominable Snowmen, they said, lived on the slopes of Everest, Culmahari and Karola. It was well known throughout Tibet that this was so. Murderers there were driven into the waste places to die. They did not die but became demons. A colony of such lived on Karola, and woe-betide the traveller who fell into their hands.

Years before attempts were made to climb Everest, an English traveller, Mr. Hugh Knight, returning from Tibet, dismounted in a mountain clearing to rest his horse. He heard a sound, and looking round, he saw, twenty paces away, a man, six feet high, naked in the bitter cold of a November day. A yellow man of Mongoloid appearance, with a shock of matted hair, large, splayed feet, great formidable hands, the chest, arms, bowed legs and bent back of a gorilla, body covered with hair—yet a man not a beast—a creature such as man may have been in the beginning.

The creature did not see Mr. Knight. It was gazing intently down the mountain-side, watching

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some movement there of man or beast. In one hand it carried a primitive bow. At the end of what seemed five minutes, and may have been as few moments, the creature started off at a run down the slope, and the watcher marvelled at the speed at which it travelled. Down, down, leaping fearlessly among rock and crag where men and animals must pick their way with caution, and vanished.

So they met, these two; modern man, at the peak of civilization, primitive man—if man it was—Everest's savage child, little higher than the beasts—yet, thrilling thought, naked and alone, reaching altitudes in that White Hell where even the stoutest hearts must falter.

One other traveller, an Italian named Tombazi, claimed encounter with the Troglodyte. Tombazi was on a photograph expedition in the Himalaya. Near the Kabur Mountain, he said, he saw the wild man, a thing moving swiftly on the mountain-side, which at first he thought to be some animal. He examined it through powerful glasses, saw that it was man-like, walking upright, naked, covered with hair; stooping occasionally to tear up roots. Finally it disappeared in the thick scrub. Tombazi followed the track and coming to the place where he had seen the creature move, he found its footprint. They were like those of a man, six inches long, spreading outwards at the toes.

Well, where do we get? Travellers' tales or mountain folklore? Tibetan murderers turned Ishmael in the desert of snow and ice to prey on lonely travellers. Scant living that would be, one thinks. Even so what would it profit a murderer, Tibetan or otherwise, to leave his footprint on the snows of Everest or Kanchen-

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junga so high above the forest line? In search of food, maybe. But the farthest limits of vegetable growth are 17,000 feet on Everest and there warm-blooded mammalian life ends, unless it be the silly hare or prowling mountain-fox, stray venturers in the higher altitudes. Beyond, there is no living thing upon the ground except the cannibal spider, lurking among the rocks, and, strange economy of nature—preying upon his fellow spider, because there is no other thing to eat in all the wild.

Winged things in plenty. Bees, moths and butterflies, at 21,000 feet—the Apollo butterfly, with furry body and rigid wings—his armoury against the cold and tearing winds. Birds—the little redstart, seen as high as 18,000 feet on ice near the foot of Everest; the splendid, grisly lammergeyer vulture, soaring like a dark angel over the crest of a 20,000 feet high peak. Choughs, according to Lieut.-Colonel Norton, have been seen flocking round a summit at almost 24,000 feet. Wherever the climbers went, there went the chough, persistent little petrel of the mountain-storms—following even to the immense height of 27,000 feet where the climbers stopped. Strange camp followers, out-topping even the eagle in his loftiest flight.

If it were food, the Snowman, or the Bear, went there in search of, he would have a thin time of it.

II

There is another explanation of the Snowman legend, not more far-fetched than the others perhaps. Wherever men go in the Himalayas they encounter pilgrims, Hindu, Tibetan, Butanese, climbing, alone,

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unaided, in search of the sacred source of the Ganges, bent, it may be, on immolation at the highest point they can reach before the throne of the gods.

To the Hindu the Himalayan peaks are the seat of the Trinity—Brahma, Vishnu, Siva. In their torrents, caves, tangled jungles, glaciers and abyss, dwelt the myriad Hindu divinities. “Himalays! Himalays! Abode of the Gods,” chants the Brahmin in his temple and his cry, which is a prayer, re-echoes in unnumbered Hindu hearts. To the Himalayas, therefore, go the holy ones, Yogi and Sadhu, naked and unkempt, braving the terrors of the jungle, tiger, hamadryad and the blood-sucking leech, walking unscathed, the Hindu devotee believes (as Dante journeyed through the seven hells of fire and ice) because they are immortal. By the banks of the sacred rivers, more often at the source, bursting a torrent from its parent glacier, they sit them down—not to weep, but to meditate in yoga posture, legs crossed, hands folded upwards, eyes fixed upon the navel. So they stay unmoving, is the belief, through the years (through the centuries), never changing posture, burned by the suns, bleached by the blizzard, growing gnarled and skeleton-thin, immune from material sensation, until they are wrapt away by the gods for rebirth and renewal of the pilgrimage, or—highest attainment of all—into the ecstatic extinction of Nirvana.

Ruttledge, leader of the Everest Expeditions of 1933 and 1936, has told of one of those holy hermits, of whom he heard tell during a 600-mile tramp in Western Tibet. The traveller and his party had reached the blue waters of Lake Rakhas, which they found to be sweet.

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“On one of the islands near the southern shore there is wrapped in contemplation a sadhu (holy man) from Muttra, to whom a year’s supply of food is taken across the winter ice.

“In the previous winter the ice gave way beneath the provision party and they were drowned. My informants could not say whether any further attempt was made to reach the unfortunate hermit.”

Another strange place visited on this journey was a gaunt and awe-inspiring valley, one side of which was formed by terrific limestone precipices.

“Some three miles up the valley lies the little Bandiphu monastery, with a staff of three men and one woman, and close by are a few caves in which hermits are walled-up for prolonged meditation.”

The hermit on his frozen island, starving to death, and the holy ones bricked up in their cells, 15,000 feet above sea-level, are strange examples of the power of the spirit to subdue the flesh. Stranger still are those higher in the mystic profession of reincarnations, who—the devout votary believes—inhabit the glaciers, caves and rock-clefts far beyond the reach of man, sleeping like holy Rip Van Winkles over periods of 200, or ten times 200 years—in time that is, as measured by man, for they are outwith time in the Eternal, body an empty shell in which burns dimly the tiny flicker of material being.

Sometimes the call comes and they awaken from their sleep of centuries to revisit the lower earth on some mystical purpose, or to climb still higher, to the very throne of the god and be caught up in his fiery chariot, his plumed crest of whirling ice.

All nonsense, of course, says one in his easy-chair,

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his mind a closed circle which demon or strange god cannot break—his counter magic to theirs. But nonsense to the Hindu or Tibetan mystic who adventures beyond the orbit of sensation, is a word of other meaning. People who know the East and have studied the secrets of its queer esoteric religions do not always accept the proposition that reality ends with the Four-Square logic of Western science, or that experience may not be pursued down the labyrinthine ways of Yogi or Lamaistic philosophy.

Dr. Dyhrenfurth, leader of the German expedition to Kanchenjunga, has told a Berlin audience of Tibetans able to create warmth by the power of suggestion. They could not only spend the night in the snow clad only in a shirt, but, by the heat given out from their bodies they could dry wet cloths placed on them. One who could dry six such cloths was a "pupil"—he became a "master" when he could dry twenty. Ridiculous accomplishment, but not so ridiculous if a preparation for pilgrimage to the heaven of the ice-gods. Telepathy, Dyhrenfurth asserted, was employed in certain parts of Tibet, just like the telephone in Europe—apparently without the worry of "wrong numbers." A messenger was sent on a twelve days' journey to the headquarters at Darjeeling to report the death of a bearer, but when he arrived he found that the local natives had already informed the headquarters of the man's death on the same evening on which it occurred.

Milarepa, the Tibetan saint, whose life has been recorded by Mr. W. Y. Evans-Wentz, is said to have attained Buddhahood in one lifetime. By constant solitary meditation he was able to subjugate the body

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to extreme privation, and to develop superhuman mental powers. In time, by controlling certain nerves, he succeeded in keeping warm even in the coldest weather, with no covering ; he practised levitation, and projected his body through time and space, making journeys in a day that ordinarily took several months. His mental culture was such that he could perform "miracles," things temporal or material forming no impediment to his will. He taught realization through personal experience, shunning anything likely to lead to a formula beginning "I believe."

Probably also, if what they say of him be true, shunning that other formula beginning: "I don't believe."

Milarepa, anyway, is said to have been "possessed of a mastery over natural forces as yet undiscovered, but probably suspected, by Western science," and Mr. Evans-Wentz suggests that we are so dominated "by faith in physical facts that we have become unfitted to retain our old, ancestral faith in facts which are super-physical," which contain the secrets of the universe.

It was belief in powers such as these that sent the strangest of all Everest climbers—Maurice Wilson—to his death on the mountain. It is a similar belief—applied in other ways—though it may be disputed, that leads the Everest expeditions to assail the summit—the superiority of things spiritual, triumph of mind over matter. There is little else to claim for the climbing of Everest. It is that which stirs response in the hearts of those who read of their adventures.

But they go in the Western way, equipped and armoured against fate, spurred and helmeted as for

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war; their pilgrims' staff, the ice-axe; their script, the Book of Science; their husks, a tin of sardines. The humble holy man goes naked and alone in access of meditation, which we call madness. It may have been his footprint they found upon the mountain-side. It may be such as he, matted and wild, that has given rise to the legend of the ape-man thing of which the natives tell.

There is, of course, the other possibility of which we spoke before, of lost tribes imprisoned in the mountain-folds, peoples unknown to us as we to them, remote as Australasia's aborigines before Cook sailed to Botany Bay.

The Himalaya is a mountain continent. Behind its alpine barriers, between the plateau of Tibet, the plains of India and Nepal, is no-man's land, largely unexplored, the secrets of which may never be revealed perhaps, so land-locked are those forbidden Edens, so guarded from profane intrusion by glittering glacier sword. Yet, into some of them travellers have burst, through jungle loopholes, and have told of lovely pastures carpeted with flowers, running streams and magic islands set in sleeping lakes, bird and beast as tame as in the dawn before the Serpent came, fearless of man. In other valleys such as these there may be Adam's breed, and some bold Cain it may be who breaks through into the outer world, or is cast forth to live in darkness on the mountain-side.

The discovery of one such lost tribe was reported in 1921 by the woman explorer, Jill Crossley-Batt and Dr. Irvine Baird, of Montreal. These explorers were definitely of the opinion that the tribe was Chaldean in origin. They numbered between 600 and 800 and

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their country was over 17,000 feet high in an isolated spot of the Himalayas near Tibet. They had been isolated from the rest of the world for centuries, and were remarkably long-lived, some members of the tribe—according to their own chronology, a year of nine months—being 108 years old. These people were cave dwellers, vegetarian, and of an astonishingly high culture, considering their isolation. They possessed remarkable paintings done on goatskins with vegetable dyes. One, it was claimed, was 750 years old. Inscriptions in their caves and the manuscripts in their possession convinced the explorers of their Chaldean origin. The Chaldean race, as known to history, occupied a large area in what is now known as Iraq or Mesopotamia.

So one may go on weaving the fascinating Himalayan tapestry of surmise and travellers' lore. Truth, which ends in the foothills, may suffer strange transmutations in the high solitudes. The sun, which plays strange tricks with the drift snow, shaping it into the semblance of a human foot, may play as strange tricks with the mind's eye of the mountaineer, creating in it mirages for which he cannot account in terms of his experience, or, perhaps, unveiling his senses so that he "sees" or senses uncomprehending, what the mystic already knows.

III

"Those who tread the last 1,000 feet of Everest tread the physical limits of the world," said F. S. Smythe, and he tells a weirder tale than even that of Bury's footprint. It is a tale of the unseen com-

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panion who accompanied him on his solitary assault on the summit in 1933—of the unseen companion and the ghostly, bird-like things pulsating in the thin air 27,000 feet above the earth.

Were these phenomena reality or figments of an overtired body and oxygen-starved brain? Beyond the limits of physical endurance at Everest's peak, does the mind slip for a moment into another dimension where things invisible and impalpable as the rarefied air they inhabit may be sensed or seen? Smythe drew no inferences—that was not his job—he merely described.

He was climbing alone, yet, all the time it seemed, not alone. Shipton, his companion of the climb, had given up on account of sickness, but, it seemed to Smythe, there was someone else behind him. He had no feeling of fear—rather one of trust in the unseen companion. At times there was the certainty that they were roped together, and that if he fell, the unseen thing at the other end of the rope would save him.

Smythe tells how he glanced back once or twice, so certain was he of this presence. When he reached his highest point and knew that he could go no further, he stopped to eat a piece of cake. And, all unthinking of what he did, he carefully divided it in two and turned around with one portion in his outstretched hand.

Only then came the full shock of realization that there was no one there.

The presence remained with him on the way down. It seemed to him that this presence was a strong, friendly and helpful one, and it was not until he sighted Camp VI and found himself again amongst human companions that he felt really alone.

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The link connecting him to the beyond was snapped, and with it went a sense of something irrevocably lost, as though a valued, trusted friend had died.

Illusion? Yes. But of the balloon-birds hovering in the sky, Smythe is not so certain that it was illusion due to fatigue. Glancing in the direction of the North Ridge he saw two curious objects suspended in space, motionless except for a slow pulsation—a pulsation much slower than his heart-beats—which, he says, is of interest, supposing it was an optical illusion.

They resembled kite-balloons in shape, one with what appeared to be squat, under-developed wings; the other with a protuberance suggestive of a beak.

Very dark in colour, they were sharply silhouetted against the sky and he saw them distinctly over a period of time, during which he subjected himself to various physical and mental tests. His brain appeared to be working normally. He looked away for a moment, then turned his sight again to the spot where the bird-things hung pulsating slowly in a trance-like rhythm. They were still there. They had not followed his line of vision as the blurred, mirage suns one sometimes sees against the sky, will do when one is tired; they had not gone or changed in outline as a mirage should beneath the shifted gaze. They were not blurred but “sharply silhouetted” against the sky.

Smythe looked away again; identified peaks, valleys and glaciers as a mental test and looked back again. The strange unearthly bird-things still hovered in the sky, upstaying slowly on dark wings. He felt his pulse, counted the beats. It was steady, but its pulsations were not those of the squat, beaked birds that never were.

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Mist drifted across his line of vision. Gradually it enveloped the nightmare things, stranger surely than the harpies of Dante's Inferno. When the mist cleared, exposing the North Ridge once more, the things had vanished, as mysteriously as they came.

It is conceivable, Smythe thinks, that the vision was some peculiar effect of mist and mountain, or mirage. The bird-things were approximately at a height of 27,000 feet, he at 27,600 feet. When he saw them, a line connecting their position with his would bring them against a background of lower and distant mountains. His attitude towards the vision was one of detached curiosity. There was no fear or revulsion. It is characteristic of the spirit which animates the Everest mountaineer, that hold on sanity in face of the unknown, as shown by Smythe's mental and physical tests, that his sole comment on a spectacle that might chill the blood, and certainly increase the pulse-beats of ordinary men was—"At this, I gave them up as a bad job."

Were they lammergeyer vultures or choughs? Smythe, one may take it, was sufficiently familiar with the appearance of both these haunters of the high mountains, not to be deceived. They were something quite out of the ordinary run of human visual experience, and we, like him, must give them up as a bad job.

SECTION VI

WINGS OVER EVEREST

I

AS moths flutter round a candle, two 'planes circled erratically round the mountain-peak.

Man was over Everest at last—31,000 feet above the earth; at times only 100 feet above the jagged, tooth-like pinnacle. Too close contact with the searing flame of ice and snow streaming from the summit, and the death consummation of the moth would be theirs—shriveled wings and downward plunge—to join the other fourteen adventurers whose bones lie bleached in snow.

The four men in the tiny cabins of the Moths thought of that, of many things, their minds agape with marvel—but the ecstasy of conquest was theirs, the fever of achievement.

That was in April, 1933. The four men were: first 'plane (a Houston-Westland), the Marquis of Douglas and Clydesdale, thirty-year old heir of the Duke of Hamilton, amateur boxing champion, member of Parliament, as pilot, with, beside him, Lieut.-Colonel L. V. S. Blacker, chief observer. Second 'plane (a Westland-Wallace), Flight-Lieut. D. F. Macintyre, of Glasgow, as pilot, and S. R. Bonnett, aerial photographer to the Gaumont-British Film Corporation, as observer.

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Sucked down by eddies—down 1,000 feet—blown aside like gnats in the winds which Everest and Makalu launched at them from gaping maws, the 'planes faltered, but returned within the orbit of the fatal flame, escaping disaster by a hair's breadth. Minds, disregarding death, worked with the precision of automatons, observing, connoting, correcting. Hands, frozen inside electrically heated gloves, controlled the multiplicity of mechanical contrivances on which life depended; manipulated the cameras whose delicate retina registered what memory could not retain nor tongue describe.

From afar they had seen that white pennant, panache of Everest, that, from the plains is like a drifting web of cloud tangled in her crest.

"When, however, the machines went into it," wrote Clydesdale, "we realized it was something quite different . . . a prodigious jet of rushing winds flinging a veritable barrage of ice fragments for several miles to leeward of the peak. The force of the *rafale* was, indeed, so great as to crack the celastroid windows of the Houston-Westland's rear cockpit."

Into the outer fringes of this maelstrom they went, ice particles battering on their machines with machine-gun rattle, and, crouching, peering through the floor-traps they saw the very crest of Everest come up to meet them. It drew them like a magnet. Only 100 feet above the summit. Would they clear it? Would the tail skids strike? No time for thought—work. Camera shutters click. Fingers, driven by fatigued-enfeebled wills, fumble automatically at the shutters. Click, click, plate after plate.

"Everest, old girl, we'll get you yet," said Bruce,

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one, of the first explorers of the mountain, waving salute in defeat. And now they had "got her" in all her pride, beauty and terror, blistered peak, ravine, precipice and glacier, the She of the mountains on whose face no man had previously dared to look and live, fixed on their camera reels for all the world to see.

Magnificent achievement, magnificent machines, magnificent pilots.

And here, all honour to the woman behind the project. Of course there was a woman in it—the one woman who figures in this essentially masculine story of attempts to conquer Everest. Many women have wanted to join the expeditions, many wrote to Lord Clydesdale asking for a place in the machines; it may in the end be a woman who first sets foot upon the peak. One cannot be too sure while England still breeds Amy Mollisons and Jean Battens.

The woman in this case was Lady Houston, that doughty Britannia, whose life and great fortune are devoted (and this without irony) to showing the lesser breeds without the law—both within the Empire and beyond it—that Britain is not a land of degenerate weaklings.

Lady Houston has herself told how Lord Clydesdale called on her in the summer of 1932 and told her about the projected flight over Everest. Would she be inclined to interest herself in it?

There was a long talk. She told him she did not want to help him to commit suicide. "Oh," he said laughingly, "the attempt would be as safe as a walk round Hampstead Heath on a foggy night."

Lady Houston decided to think the matter over. The romance of it, the glory it would bring to Britain,

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thrilled her imagination. There was trouble in India. It would show the trouble-makers, the whole world, that Britain was still leader in conquests. She decided to finance the adventure.

Lord Clydesdale came to visit her again, this time in the fastnesses of her house in the Highlands. She advised him to see Orlebar, who trained the two winners of the Schneider Trophy contest. She said: "Ask him to put you through all the most unpleasant stunts he can possibly think of, as you must be absolutely fit before you start on this most dangerous adventure."

So the flight was organized. Its main purpose was geographical survey, to put Everest and her sister peaks on strips of film, oblique and vertical views which, joined together, fitted into categories, would aid the experts in putting the mountain properly on the map. Two flights were necessary to achieve this end. The first, though splendid in physical achievement was disappointing in its practical results; the second, that "magnificent piece of insubordination," undertaken against orders, filled in the photographic gaps and revealed many hitherto unsuspected secrets of the range, glaciers, contours, and a lake between 10,000 and 6,000 feet below the summit of Everest.

Picture these men in the tiny 'planes, muffled in electrically heated suits, boots, gloves, goggles, connected to the interior at two points—one for this armour against the cold that is as hot as flame, the other for the telephone. Faces goblin-masked for the thin trickle of oxygen without which, at the highest points reached, lungs would shrivel like burnt paper, the heart burst.

They are off on the first flight. The observer for the

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first ten minutes is busy with the checks and tests of the forty-six different jobs on which success depends. Pilot, at the controls, keeps an eye on the altimeter needle. Steady climb upwards. There's mist to 19,000 feet. Through the observation hatch in the floor nothing visible except the sea of haze. Climbing, climbing; steady purr of engine, so small and yet so much depends on it. What will happen at 30,000 feet? Will it freeze? Frail thing of sticks and canvas which man has fashioned to conquer the air. If it should fail.

Out of the haze now, into the blue of a cloudless sky, and through the veil of cloud is thrust a glittering scimitar of ice and snow—Kanchenjunga. Peak upon peak comes surging into view, the frozen ocean billows of the Himalaya, mantled in ice and snow, seared and gashed with precipices, abysses deep as the Alps are high, the savagely beautiful, desolate world of earth's highest mountains, stretching in naked majesty as far as the eye can see, and there, to the right, whiter and more awe-inspiring than them all—Everest, monarch of this monstrous wilderness, flaunting its snow plume—menace.

A black speck hovering in empty space, against the back-cloth of jumbled peak and blue sky—the other fellows in their 'plane. Wonder how they're getting along. What they think of it? Pilot in front, back of his helmeted head motionless; hands on the controls, keeping her steady, nose up. The god in the machine.

Something happened. Machine losing altitude. Down, in a few seconds, 2,000 feet. Through the hatchway looms a scarred summit, thrusting upward to buffet them out of existence . . . vision such as the

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fly sees of the hand that swats it! Phew! They've dodged it; almost as though the wind of its swoop had spun them overhead. We're climbing again! Everest now. Head and shoulders through the cockpit roof, into the slipstream. Trouble with oxygen mask. Stop it. Fingers frozen in gloves fumbling with cameras, verticals, obliques, film reels, still shots—160 m.p.h., hope the shots will make a mosaic, fit together. Through the hatchway, side of the pyramid rushing upwards dizzily—world gone topsy-turvy, like the helter-skelter madness of a switchback railway. Crash! No—we've done it; over the summit, only a hundred feet to spare it seems. Click! Circle, and steep bank. Pilot doing his bit to aid the cameras. Click, click. Wide sweep round to avoid the snow plume. Snow plume. That rushing jet of ice blowing eastwards from the peak, like flame from a blow-lamp. Into it then, through its comet tail, near as we may dare, ice lashing the fuselage, spattering into the cockpit—ping! Another circuit, and then home. Oxygen needle is creeping round to zero. Very tired; overwhelmed by what we've done, seen. Can do no more. Spare film in cinema-camera frozen solid; oxygen mask, a solid mass of ice. Back now, tails up, brave little engines purring their song of triumph, down, down, into the purple haze, the mountain-world fading from view, through rents in the veiling mists below, the brown plains of Nepal; no hostile menace of mountain fist mailed in ice upraised against us, but the good earth, rising slowly, spreading its great wide carpet, warmth and welcome. Down, down, and happy landings.

II

Then came realization. Everest had been conquered in flight, but the results of the camera work were inadequate. The Royal Geographical Society and the Government of India had been promised the expedition's best efforts to produce a survey by vertical photographs, if possible, of the southern slopes of Everest. Fulfilment of this undertaking was also given to the Government of Nepal.

It was obvious that a second flight would have to be made. But how, when? Air-Commodore Fellowes, D.S.O., leader of the expedition, was in bed with a temperature. He had already taken part with others of the party in a flight over Kanchenjunga during which valuable experience of mountain-flying and testing of the camera-gear, telephones and oxygen apparatus had been gained. Now the expedition was under orders to pack up and return home. They had flown over Everest and were popular heroes, but they were unable to fulfil to the letter pledges given to governments and scientific bodies. Everest had tricked them after all. The idea of a second flight had been mooted, and forbidden. Forbidden, not only by high authority but by the weather which made it impossible.

Lady Houston, it was reported, had cabled to the flyers warning them not to flout the wrath of the gods of Everest again. Air-Commodore Fellowes, from his sick-bed, had authorized a short flight for cinema purposes, providing the aeroplanes remained within gliding distance of the earth. Very well. This was about to take place. Flying-Officer Ellison,

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one of those who had gone on the Kanchenjunga flight, returned from a reconnaissance at dawn, reported excellent visibility, weather had cleared.

Clydesdale, Blacker and Macintyre, waiting to go up, must have looked at each other with a "Well, what about it?" glance. There was not very much oxygen. Soldiers disobeying orders? But what a day for it. Everything in our favour. We can conserve the oxygen until we see whether the fuel will last out, once we're up. Let's make it provisional disobedience. We're bound to succeed this time. If we don't—shot at dawn—such a dawn as this.

In you get. All ready? Away. Nobody except themselves was in the secret. Air-Commodore Fellowes, still shaky with fever, was at the aerodrome two hours later to welcome them back from the short reconnaissance flight. Bit of a shock for him; the machines were not there. Still, he'd wait a bit. Half an hour later, and he began to think things.

When did they take off?

Oh, at the appointed time.

Ah, did they take oxygen?

Yes.

And vertical cameras?

Yes.

Full petrol tanks?

Yes.

So: that was it?

Nothing to do about it except smile, look at the sky, a little anxiously, and wait.

Meanwhile, the sky-truants were doing their job, knowing that it was well done this time, dancing their midges' dance above the clouds, putting Everest

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through her paces like any film star being "shot" for fan magazine stills.

This way, please, Miss Everest. Zoom . . . click. Thank you. Now, the southern profile, please. Whee-ee-ee! Thanks. Full face on. . . .

Clydesdale and Blacker were again in the Houston-Westland; Flight-Lietenant Macintyre piloting the Westland-Wallace, with, this time, A. L. Fisher, Gaumont-British cameraman as observer. Fisher had done good work on the Kanchenjunga flight; what he did with his camera on that skylark among the Himalaya peaks helped to justify the whole naughty exploit.

Soon as they burst through the clouds he was at work with his cameras, head and shoulders outside the cockpit, film-reeling with frozen fingers. All the edentated range of the Himalayas before him, three hundred miles of it, the world's most magnificent mountain panorama, Everest the noblest peak of all. They were making for the south-west side of Everest, at 34,500 feet, but even at that height, in this tip-tilted world up whose ceiling they crawled like flies, the mountains behind had the illusory aspect of over-topping Everest.

Five hundred yards from the summit, and well above its 29,141 feet, yet looking downwards for a shot into the cloud-submerged valleys, height seemed comparatively nothing. Here and there, a hole in the cloud carpet, and through it, the empty plateau-plains of Tibet.

Busy with his cameras, Fisher—an experimental lad, as all film cameramen are—thought he'd try some high-altitude tests without oxygen mask and

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heating apparatus. Bonnet, on the first flight had almost collapsed through a failure of his oxygen.

Fisher found he could dispense with the heating for the boots, the padded, electrically charged suit being sufficient. Thermometer was minus 45 degrees Centigrade. Then he found he could do without his right glove, except in the slipstream. It was needed in the slipstream, because when he put his gloveless hand outside, the nails became brittle and splintered.

Next, he thought, need a high-flying pilot become unconscious if the oxygen supply fails? Supposing one were to manipulate the mask so as to create a funnel which would collect and compress the thin air? Let's try it. He did, at 27,000 feet, and again at 23,000 feet, putting his head through the cockpit flap, back to the slipstream, and holding his mask six inches from his face. It worked all right, for three-minute spells.

Macintyre also, in his pilot's seat, had been submitting himself to experiment, wearing an improvised oxygen mask, a light cloth helmet, and doing without goggles. No feeling of discomfort, and vision greatly improved. Everything was going splendidly. They had been forbidden on this occasion to fly direct over the summit, so, at 34,000 feet Macintyre made a bee-line to within one hundred yards of the peak, put up the nose of the aeroplane and shot a vertical of the crest at close quarters through the floor hatch.

Both machines had kept formation up to 32,000 feet, then Clydesdale branched off to tackle the eastern side of the survey. On the way up Blacker had been busy taking obliques of the declivities and ranges running south-west from Everest, aspects of the

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mountain hitherto unknown to and unseen by man. This was the prize for which they had risked their lives and disobeyed orders—not the glory of a second “stunt” flight over Everest, but a strip of photograph, promised as an honourable undertaking and now, at last, secured.

Macintyre was to connect the summit by a series of overlapping vertical photographs to a given point; Clydesdale, to attempt to connect the summit of Makalu, Everest’s nearest neighbour peak, with Komaltar by similar verticals.

Had they done it? Back at the base, explanations given, all else forgotten in the excitement of what the dark-room would reveal, they waited. They were satisfied. The spools had come out perfectly, photographs were admirable, all overlaps complete, all exposures remarkably free from distortion. They had secured an unbroken survey strip.

III

It was inevitable that there should be controversy over the photographs when they were shown to the public. For the first time in history man had flown over Everest and her jumble of sister peaks, looking down upon them from above, and in the excitement of that first flight, the fumbling with cameras, from one to the other, through the cockpit and through the floor hatch, errors of judgment had occurred. Most serious of all, that of photographing the summit of Makalu in mistake for Everest. It was an understandable geographical error, in the circumstances, and one which was realized by the fliers soon after

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their return. They were flying in machines travelling at from 150 to 160 miles an hour. At that speed an enormous amount of country can be covered, and, as Brigadier-General Bruce pointed out at the time, a machine flying over the summit of Everest would be over the summit of its sister mountain, Makalu, within three or four minutes. There was no question of doubting the fliers' claims to have flown over Everest. What puzzled the mountaineering experts and the geographers was the captioning of some of the photographs.

The matter was set at rest by Lord Clydesdale, who admitted in a speech at Glasgow that when the first flight was made on April 3, the wrong mountain was photographed. He said that while the observer was in the cockpit changing a reel in his camera, the aeroplane's course was altered. When the observer looked up again he was unaware of the fact with the result that he photographed a mountain some miles away in mistake for Everest.

Experts were of the opinion that this mountain was Makalu, about twelve and a half miles distant.

"I turned round and hit him in the ribs," said Lord Clydesdale, "and he did see his mistake very quickly. We got some very good photographs of the north-east ridge of Everest."

More serious criticism came from Dr. T. H. Somervell, who was one of the 1924 expedition during which Mallory and Irvine were lost. Addressing the Madras Rotary Club, Dr. Somervell said: "I have no hesitation in saying that most of the photographs they have taken are not of Everest at all, as far as I can make out. Only one of them contains a glimpse of Everest; all

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show the various points the aerial party got to, and from which points the photographs were taken.

"None of these points, so far as I can see, was within twenty miles of Everest."

To this Lord Clydesdale made answer: "I cannot take Dr. Somervell's suggestions seriously. All I can say is that we took a large number of photographs of the summit of Mount Everest. But I would like to emphasize that we did not merely wish to photograph Everest, but other Himalyan country as well."

One begins to understand the causes that led to that second flight, the temptation that morning at Lalbalu aerodrome to "disobey orders." Those four Britons, two Scots, two English, nasty combination for opposing men or mountains; determination plus dourness, dash salted with caution—behind them the record of a great achievement that had yet not quite fulfilled its purpose; before them Everest, ironic, still holding close the secrets they had come to raid.

Supposing we fail again? Supposing we do? Supposing this, supposing that. Wrath of the gods? Wrath of my aunt. Wrath of ourselves if we accept defeat. Better to fail on a grand slam Himalayan scale than only to half-fail. Into the 'planes then and away. Have at ye, Everest!

Now the mountain treasures were reft from her by these bold raiders. Two unknown glaciers, lying like a necklace on her bosom, a glittering lake, thirty miles long, 20,000 feet above the earth, a lake of warm water, so it seemed, guarded for ever by grim bastions of ice and rock from man's encroachment. The "Great Sea in the Clouds" of Tibetan mythology. What strange forms of life may lurk in its green depths

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one can but surmise. No man will ever visit its deserted shores nor cast his questing net upon its waters. It lies there in the mountain's lap, where it has lain since first the mountains were, where it will lie, maybe when man is gone, a dead sea in a dead world.

Piecing together of the photographs taken on the second flight showed how well the airmen had done their work. Section by section the mosaic fitted, with scarcely a gap between. Only defect was when the aeroplane had banked so that the camera pointing vertically downwards could take obliques of the summit. But the defect left no doubt in the mind of the geographers that the pilot's track went the whole way to the summit of Everest.

The two glaciers were found to lie respectively to the south-west and south-east of Lhotse (27,890 feet), a sister peak of Everest; the great lake, near the head of the Khumbu Glacier. Geographers were not so certain about it. The image on the photograph showed a flat surface on the easterly slope of Nuptse (25,700 feet), between that peak and Everest, 200 feet across. They agreed that it was unlikely to be rock or black ice, since either, at that enormous height, would undoubtedly be white with drifted snow. But if water, it must be water of a temperature to melt the snow that fell into it; a mighty survival of the age of chaos when Everest and all the Himalaya were upthrust from out the ocean bed, oceans and continents dissolved in shock and countershock, and earth, a spitting fusee ball went tumbling round the parent sun from which she was spat forth; the age when all was dark and void, before God breathed upon the waters and bade them be still.

SECTION VII
HE WENT ALONE

I

NOW comes the strangest figure in all the cavalcade of adventurers marching to attack upon the mountain. Ghost of a young man, stockily built, broad Yorkshire face at physical odds with the burning eyes, in which gleam a light which men of the West dismiss as "madness," men of the East more subtly discern as spiritual purpose. He walks alone, eyes fixed upon the peak, incongruous as a bowler-hatted citizen among the Kings and Princes of a Coronation procession, slightly ridiculous, slightly pathetic; a silken Union Jack in his hand to plant amid the writhing snakes of Everest's Medusa head—and passes, rather noble, rather tragic, very brave.

Was he mad, Maurice Wilson? Yes, in the sense that Lindbergh might have been accounted "mad" had he vanished on that flight that shook the world; Picard in his gondola, had it gone pop among the clouds—as all adventurers are mad who do things first, alone and unafraid, and fail.

But there was reason in his madness, so he thought, and had he lived to prove the truth for which he died, he would have been the paragon of heroes, in view of half the world a demi-god.

Strange claims for a beefy young man from York-

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shire, but not strange to the people who knew him best, or those of other races who were with him at the end before he set out alone, on foot, to conquer Everest.

Maurice Wilson was about thirty-five when, in 1933, he first began to trouble the authorities at the London Flying Club with his declared intention of flying to Everest in his second-hand Gipsy Moth. The world was ringing with the exploits of the Houston-Everest airmen, and knowing the difficulties they had encountered, even as a highly trained and fully equipped organization, nobody had much time to bother with this frankly impossible one-man stunt which could only end in disaster. He had completed his first solo flight only two months before. He had no experience of high-altitude mountaineering, least of all, of Himalaya climbing. Experts warned him of the dangers and difficulties; he remained unshaken in his determination. Lest there should be no misunderstanding, he pointed out that he did not intend to fly *over* Everest—that had already been done—his intention was to fly as high as his machine would go, “crash” it on some safe landing spot on the mountain-side, and then proceed to the summit on foot.

Worse than madness. He would need porters, equipment, oxygen, support camps, stores—a hundred and one things. He knew all these things, he said; he had read all there was to be read about the panoply of war against Everest, the attacks by massed formation, and he was confident he could succeed where others had failed. One man, alone, free, unhampered, determined, could go where the many might recoil.

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Oxygen? He had a secret which could dispense with that—controlled breathing—the science of the Yogi masters which he had studied; the power to sublimate body in mind so that neither cold, nor hunger, lack of food or air would prove impediment to purpose. The conquest of Everest, they said in the books, was largely a spiritual essay in man's progress—that, in many ways, was its main justification. Well, he was going to prove it, in his own way.

They gave him up and let him go his own way. He did. He began to get small paragraphs in the newspapers. These brief, politely ironic chapters in his odyssey are his memorial—these, and a cairn of stones more than 20,000 feet up the mountain-side.

Wilson had his tiny 'plane fitted with long-distance tanks. He named it the "Ever Wrest," a sign of the flamboyant in his complex character, which made him also pose for photographs, standing in his 'plane, smiling, hand pointing upwards. But he was no mountebank publicity-seeker, as events proved. He gave his life for an ideal in which he believed sincerely.

He had a week-end try-out from Stag Lane aerodrome, Middlesex, and crashed—not on the slopes of Everest, but in a field at Cleckheaton, Yorkshire.

Paragraph in the papers:

Everest Flier Crashes.

At Cleckheaton.

People smiled. He smiled back. It was suggested that he ought to be stopped somehow, some way, before he broke his neck. He was certain to crash somewhere if he were allowed to leave for India in his crazy machine.

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"Stop me? Never!" he said, after the Cleckheaton fiasco. "I've been eight months studying the mountain; I've spent two months in an aeroplane. I want to show that long training for flying, or mountaineering, is not necessary." The Houston expedition, he thought, had not conquered Everest by merely flying over the top of it. Everest was still unconquered; still challenged man. Man could attain to superhuman stature by following certain rules of health, dieting and fasting. To such men from the East, the mountain had bowed before; one coming from the West would show his brethren the way; the silken Union Jack, planted on Everest's topmost peak, would be a symbol of the race to come.

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No more paragraphs for a while, then one recalling his existence and his daft purpose, making people say: "Then he really means it?"

"Everest Airman Missing," said headlines in May, 1933. "Ah! thought so," said people, "that'll be the last heard of him."

But no. A month later little paragraphs from Karachi, saying that he was being held up through not receiving permission from the Nepal Government to fly over Nepalese territory.

"Great Scot! then he's actually got as far as India!" People began to sit up and take notice. This young man meant to do something unless he were stopped. Good thing they had refused him permission. The police had taken possession of his machine. Little gaps of time in the story—sufficient for one to forget what it was all about—then more paragraphs: "Everest

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Flier Missing Again." No; he has turned up at Saran, South Nepal, and left for Lucknow. The jungle has not got him apparently. Had been held up for a week by bad weather on the way. But is still determined to fly to Everest.

No more of him for a year, and strange tales begin to trickle through from Darjeeling. He has sold his Gipsy Moth and has lived for months with Hindu mystics, training for the ascent on a diet of dates and cereals; fasting, practising deep-breathing, meditation.

What did they think of him, these "Hindu mystics?" This strange, young Englishman who came to them for such a purpose; they with their whole lives consecrated to the practice of a ritual which is their very being; a ritual of negation whose end is nothing? He with the beef and bones of Britain in him—now growing thin and tanned and bearded, maybe—his Western mind with its clean, compacted chambers, trying to adapt its processes to their labyrinthine ways of thought. Did they try to dissuade him from his purpose, pointing out that many lives, many reincarnations, are necessary for fulfilment? Could they have dissuaded him, had they cared?

Disguised as an Indian, he has assembled a number of experienced Everest guides and left with them for the Tibetan frontier. His novitiate ended, he must work in secret. His movements are watched; his designs forbidden. It was mad enough to think of "crashing" an aeroplane on Everest and then climbing to the peak, but this other project to cross the mountain-barriers, through plain and swamp and jungle, into the Forbidden Land, and so, on foot, alone towards his end. . . . "No," to that.

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But they could not stop him; nothing could now. Travelling by night, he has penetrated Tibet, evading capture at the frontier, and he has vanished in the mountains. Three porters accompany him on the climb to the Rongbuk Monastery, that lonely lamasery on the glacier's edge, at the feet of the God Mountain. Here he stays some time (it appeared later) learning the lore of the Lamas, astounding them, as no doubt he astounded the Indian mystics, with his knowledge of their ways. Many white men have they seen and talked with; men come to brave the wrath of the gods. None has succeeded; always the Goddess Mother of the Snows has thrown them back, lashing them with her storms, taking the breath from their bodies, blinding them with her snows, turning the blood in their veins to ice. Many she has cast to death into the utter abysses of forgetfulness, because she is inviolate.

Now, this man, one of the race of English who have conquered half the world, who comes alone to dare the goddess. He is like the other English, but different in many ways. They come like warriors, armed with strange devices, devil-masks upon their faces; with many followers. They are cunning in the ways of the mountains, the winds and the sky portents, but innocent as children of the ways of the gods. For them, life begins and ends with one birth; it is less than one revolution of a prayer-wheel, less than one bead upon the string which can be told interminably until the cord be worn. They can talk learnedly of all beliefs, listen respectfully, but it is obvious that belief they have none. To them time is now; there is no yesterday and no to-morrow; life

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is a may-fly matter of a moment which must be spent in buzzing action.

This man is different. He comes humbly as a pilgrim, unarmed, girded about with resolution. What he believes is difficult to fathom. He listens and disputes, and he is wise in the lore of India. He has prepared himself for destiny by prayer and fasting, and like the holy men he will go alone into the mountain never to return. He thinks he will return; of that he has no doubt. He has his country's flag to plant upon the peak, a little picture-box to bring its image back, some food, sufficient for his needs, and that is all. Well he is mad; they are all mad, the English. He can but fail, and so find happiness, release.

The three porters accompany Wilson from the monastery on the climb to Camp III, at 20,000 feet. Here they stop; refuse to go farther. They are humble men, accustomed to obey without question the orders of their white masters, and this One they have come to respect with something more than awe. They have been with him on that secret march across the frontiers, and know his way of life, its sparseness and its grim subordination to the will. But now, they are afraid, for him and for themselves. No human will can pit its puny might against the eternal nay. Beyond this point man dare not go alone. In company, with rope and axes, yes; from camp to camp, 2,000 feet apart, where there is warmth, and food and succour in distress, and, higher still, where two may go alone, but masked and fitted to withstand the worst.

There are no ropes, no masks, no help of any kind.

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They must not let him go; they argue, plead, dare force to restrain him.

You cannot go, sahib; beyond this point is death. This is enough; you have done more than any man before. You do not know the cold that strikes men dead; the snow-blindness that is fire within the eyes, lead in the brain; the winds that are an icy stream, stronger than running water, draining the body of strength, filling the mouth and nostrils, drowning you. Up there, there are steps to cut in ice; the earth's weight is a chain about your legs, it clogs your feet and drags them as in dreams. Five steps and you must stop to fight for breath. The air will whistle through your empty lungs, your heart will leap within you till it breaks.

Oh yes; he knows all that, but has no fear; neither of cold that kills nor wind nor air. His heart and lungs, they know, he can control by power of will, his body is the servant of his mind. He knows the way, has studied it in books, and go he must. To come thus far and then to be afraid?

He takes with him a tent, three loaves, two tins of oatmeal, his camera and the silken Union Jack, and sets out alone to conquer Everest. He bids the porters good-bye, telling them to wait a fortnight for him. One of them can have his pack-pony. But they must wait; he will return.

The porters, silent now that they can do no more, watch him go towards the heights, over the glacier, swept by avalanches, where the temperature is 50 degrees below zero. He had hoped to find the tracks and ropes left by the Ruttledge expedition of 1933. He would be perfectly all right.

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Smaller and smaller the figure grows, struggling over the glacier, now disappearing, now emerging, a black speck in the wastes of snow and ice, an ant attempting to scale the pyramid.

One last appeal. The porters call to him: "Come back, come back, sahib, you go to death."

He turns and waves to them encouragingly, pointing to the peak, and goes on. Now the figure vanishes; they can see him no more. Night falls. They huddle in their tent, discussing him. He will come back, he must, to-morrow, or the next day, when he cannot struggle on. They must be patient and wait.

He had told them to wait a fortnight; they waited a month, because, despite their fears and warnings he had inspired them with a belief in his power which made them regard him as a supernatural being. At the end of the month they came down to the valleys and told their tale.

It was Eric Shipton, leader of the advance party of the Ruttledge 1936 expedition, who found Wilson's body, on July 19, 21,000 feet up on the Rongbuk Glacier. He had died in his sleep from exhaustion and cold.

Beside the body was a diary, last entry, May 31, 1934, which said: "Off again, gorgeous day."

His other equipment, the camera and the Union Jack, which he had hoped to plant upon the peak, 8,000 feet above, lay scattered around. The tent had blown away.

They buried him in a crevasse, icy tomb of the mountaineer, and Shipton built a cairn to mark the spot where the body was found.

SECTION VIII
THE FOURTH ASSAULT

I

LOOK, some summer's day, to the far horizon, over the level fields, the soft hill contours of the English scene, to where the heavens bend to touch the earth. It is a still day, made for midsummer dreams. Let's lie on the grass, the senses lulled, and drift into the Cloud Cuckoo Land of invention.

Beyond the farthest line of sky fringing the arc of vision, cloud masses pile their peaks into the blue, so far, so high, so unattainable, alluring. These are the Himalayas of our daydream; this Darjeeling. Sierras in the wide savanna of the heavens, we go to conquer them, to scale that loftiest pinnacle of all, piercing the lesser drift clouds, lovely, aloof and terrible. Whiter than snow they are, a-glitter in the sun; light flashes from their spear-points; shows gloom cold blue in the shadows of their awful scars; shimmers on shield and glaive of glacier; sparkles from their mantle-folds of snow.

Whetted by wind, by lightning clash of steel, by thunderbolt, they have affronted time and space and daunted them. They are the last grim phalanx of the gods.

Assuredly, if gods there be—elemental things that ride the storm—this is their refuge and their citadel. Dare we invade it, carry it by assault? Yes, we dare

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—have dared it—must. We, of the Western world, who weigh the stars and swing the earth a trinket at our wrist, that is our destiny—never to rest from our god-hungry search which we call seeking truth, on mountain-top, in space, in time, among the stars, inside the atom, in test-tubes, in the alembic of thought. The world is ours, and all that it inherit—then for the cosmos. So Everest becomes a symbol of the search.

It is easy to think of gods—to talk of gods in this gargantuan land of Himalaya. This is another world where man has other ways of thought, and even the mountaineer is touched with awe and reverence before its majesty.

From Darjeeling the climbers' route lies through the mountain-passes to Kampa Dzong in Tibet nearly 300 miles distant. From the plains of Bengal to the bleak, gale-swept uplands of the Central Asian plateau, a blighted, treeless land 10,000 to 14,000 feet above sea-level. The roof of the world; interminable plains, where Asia ends, where life, perhaps, began. Now, lifeless but for a few sparse villages of yellow men, the Lama in his scarlet robe and yellow hat, the yak, lumbering, lowering, that lichenized rock of an animal, trailing its tattered pell, black, shaggy old man of the mountain.

But it is a land of wonder and beauty if one raises one's eyes from the earth, a land as magical as those little worlds of snow and ice, set in a crystal globe, where white flakes scurry at a hand's touch. Now are the mountains nearer, higher, whiter, glittering in the crystal air against a sky of fleckless blue. So near they seem in that enchanted air, though many miles away.

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This is Flatland, land of two-dimensional ways of life and thought; the baby's rattle prayer-wheel, the Lama wrapt in his arid abstractions, peasantry parasitic on the yak and of little more intelligence.

By contrast, on the way up is that other flatland, Sikkim; a land hung sideways on the mountain-slopes. Jungle of tall trees climbing up the steeps till man is dwarfed, an ant among the grass; monstrous, writhing flowers, metallic butterflies as big as flowers; nightmare spiders building webs like nets, painted parrots flashing through the trees, adding their strident chorus to the muted orchestration of the humming, buzzing, rasping things that crawl or flash like arrows through the sunshafts from above. A land of teeming, steamy life, the hamadryad and the sucking leech.

Up from the valley, through the bamboo belts and now the mountains flame in flowering bush, the rhododendron of the Himalaya; conifer and cypress, silver fir, then the scrub wastes and the bare pass, gateway to Tibet. The wide plain and the piled potala of the Phari Dzong. Hamlet of hovels grovelling at the monastery's feet. Silent people and savage dogs; streets that are open sewers, air acrid with the smell of yak's dung fuel. Scavenger ravens croaking overhead; sentinel vulture in the sky. Bring out your dead.

Westward is Kampa Dzong and the virgin purity of the mountains. Thence, the ascent begins.

II

Our expedition has been weeks on the way. Mules and ponies have been the mode of transport through

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the passes and the valleys. Now, at Kampa Dzong, 15,000 feet above sea-level, we engage yak transport for the equipment, the sleeping-bags, stoves, rope-ladders, ice picks, tents, tinned foods, medical supplies, scientific instruments, oxygen cylinders, clothing and boots. There are 300 animals and, in addition to our party of twelve men, who go forward on foot, there is the small army of camp followers, Nepalese, Sherpa and Bothian porters, hardy little mountain-men, brown and active as monkeys. We must move upwards slowly, in easy stages, for the air is thin and tenuous now; we are as high as Mont Blanc, and we have not yet begun the ascent. Everest towers above us, as high again as Mont Blanc. We move in a medium where one feels like a fish out of water, heart and lungs must adapt their mechanism to the change. It is a month since we left Darjeeling; by slow marches we have reached Shekar Dzong, fortress monastery where a gigantic Buddha looks down upon the mountains like the Christ of the Andes. Five days' march from there and we have come to the highest temple in the world, the monastery of Rongbuk, 16,500 feet high, where kindly, silent yellow men worship at the very feet of the gods. This is the base camp. Before us stretches the great Rongbuk Glacier, that frozen torrent of ice, sweeping downwards from the mountains, Changse, Everest's north shoulder (24,730 feet), jutting its bulk between this icy mail. Westwards, the main glacier, leading to the unknown wilderness; eastwards, or left, towards the peak, the lesser arm, the chink in Everest's armour. This way we go, over crevasse, moraine, to Camp I (17,800 feet high). It is not difficult going for the

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experienced mountaineer; mostly snow and ice; slopes are not excessively steep, rocks here are not precipitous. But it is terribly slow, and wearing. Nerve strain tells, breath and tempers become short.

That ridiculous, muffled figure in front there, plod, plod, plodding on; clump of his boots in the snow; stopping, leaning on his axe-haft to rest, turning round to smile, his irritating, inane smile, the light glinting on his goggles. . . . He looks like a golliwog, black-faced, bearded, tufts of hair sticking out—why the devil doesn't he do something! The way he drinks his tea—warming his hands on the flask!

And the man behind—what is he thinking of me? Same things, I suppose. This is the mountain madness; monotony, the slow sapping spell she casts upon you. Earth is pulling at your feet, the mountains press you down, you move in a dream—but move—that queer dream in which you are as a fly clogged in treacle, striving, with leaden feet, to climb some height, out of the depths.

The pull of gravitation. What is gravitation, what are dreams?

Gravitation is pulling at you as the treacle clings to the fly, but with every heave and struggle forward it is slipping away.

There's a long way to clamber out of the pot yet; never say die. Lift foot and shake it, plod, plod, plod. Yonder's the rim there. Perhaps when we reach it, if ever, we may take wing, shake off the earth's dross, buzz into space.

Bees in your bonnet, boy, that's what you've got!

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III

So to Camp II; Camp III—19,000 feet, 20,000 feet—becoming acclimatized. Now to the right, round Changse's elbow, and the North Col looms before you; shoulder of Everest, glittering wall of ice on which Camp IV stands perched at 23,000 feet.

Ice-axes, step-cutting, ropes, fatigue. Over that knife-edge ridge, upwards, downwards, upwards to Camp V (25,000 feet), above, crawling among the rock, scree, black ice, roof-slate slabs, to Camp VI (26,000 feet)—tents stuck on ledges, and the long dark night.

Coldness and silence of death—death on the glacier, 7,000 feet beneath, if you should roll, cocoon-like in your sleeping-bag towards the edge.

How nice that would be, the movement—fell swoop of freedom—just a roll and a long glissade, then a bump, and a plunge head foremost, turning and twisting, bump, bounce, whirl—as you have seen the sleeping-bags go, dropped from the heights to the glacier camps to save portage.

Very sickening to look at from above, but not sickening to experience surely, because so safe. No fear, no hurt, whispers the mountain spirit who is now your unseen companion, the exhilaration of flight; darkness, forgetfulness, and you will wake up safely in your bed at home—breakfast of jam and sardines.

Jam and sardines! That's what your soul craves, here on the mountain-top. Everest—England! Soon back to England, first to the peak. Three of us here in the tent. Two leave to-morrow and one remains.

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Two for the top—and by God, I'm one! Up to the north-east shoulder, rest there the night, pray that the weather holds, then for the final dash—barely a thousand feet—we cannot fail.

Dim shape in sleeping-bag; he's whom I go with; he has been there before, almost upon the peak—alone. Now I go with him. Luck? It's a young man's job. What am I? Twenty-four. But the prize shall belong to all. Why, it's nothing now, only a crag climb, less than a scramble among the fells at home. Home? Sleep first and the great adventure.

IV

About the same time as the Houston Expedition was operating from Purnea, Burma, an expedition on foot was planning the fourth attempt to scale Everest. Following the failure of the 1924 expedition and the death of Mallory and Irvine, the Dalai Lama forbade any further attempts on the mountain. The Gods were angry—and, indeed, it seemed they were. The Priest-King of the Forbidden Land was now an old man—first of his line to have survived the age of eighteen, at which stage in their earthly avatar, his predecessors had all been summoned mysteriously to undergo the process known as reincarnation.

But he was no puppet priest, as his length of years showed, and could balance a fine point between the gods of Everest and lesser, if more subtly exigeant divinities of British diplomacy.

So, in the end, it was arranged that the gods were placated, and Brigadier-General Bruce, then sixty years of age, who had led the 1922 and the 1924

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expeditions, was able to announce in 1932 that the Mount Everest Committee of the Royal Geographical Society had received from the Government of India, through the Secretary of State, the consent of the Dalai Lama for a British expedition to Mount Everest in 1933.

Strange to reflect in the twentieth century on the India Office carrying on an eight years' diplomatic correspondence with due ceremonial and form, about a point in which the gods are arbiters.

But the Dalai Lama to-day is only Diivus Cæsar with his bloody oracles and augurs in another form. Have we not to-day in Europe the spectacle of Dictators usurping semi-divine attributes, receiving the blind adoration of millions; talk of strange gods—Odin and Thor—the mumbo-jumbo nonsense of Aryanism; of obsolete generals and maniac professors mouthing Mithraic incantations about the necessity of cleansing the world in a bath of blood; fanatical worship of barbaric symbols, fasces, hammer and sickle, the swastika; the kissing of daggers; ceremonial gymnastics of outflung arms and hypnotic repetition of the holy names as magic formulæ?

The man chosen as leader of such an expedition, Sir Francis Younghusband has said, need not himself be one of the pair, or perhaps the trio, who will make the actual climb to the summit. But he must be a mountaineer, capable of keeping a team together under fearful stress, and he must be apt at treating with Tibetan officials.

The man chosen on this occasion was Mr. Hugh Rutledge, retired Indian Civil Service official, mountain-climber, explorer to whom the Himalaya land,

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its peoples and its tongues, were as an open book; the strong silent man of romance and reality; a man whose nature is one with the wild and lonely places of the earth. His home was on the tiny island of Gometra in the Western Isles of Scotland; a sea-bird haunted crag, turf-carpeted, remote; a little gem set in that archipelago of fretted isles whose names are like an Ossianic ode—Barra, Benbecula, Skye, Eigg, Muck, Colonsay, Oronsay, Jura, Coll. . . .

From the Hebrides to the Himalayas; the purple peaks of Skye, the twin paps of Jura—that Aphrodite of the Atlantic foam—to the grim Asian escarpment—Eigg's scour for Everest.

Then will come the choosing of the team, says Younghusband . . . and about this, one point stands out clearly from our Himalayan experience of recent years (1921—1922—1924 expeditions).

Those who would attain the summit must be neither too old nor too young—not too little above twenty, and not too much above thirty. A year or two below thirty is perhaps the ideal age.

In Ruttledge's team we may mark F. S. Smythe, conqueror of Kamet in 1931, perhaps the greatest mountaineer of this generation, he who has reached a higher point on Everest than any living man; E. E. Shipton, mountaineer-explorer, who was with Smythe on Kamet, and who was chosen with him on this occasion for the final attack on the summit; T. Wyn Harris, who had climbed Mount Kenya in 1929, and who was to reach 28,100 feet with the Everest 1933 party. He, with L. R. Wager, also made an abortive attempt to reach the peak. All young men, fulfilling the qualifications demanded; all except one barrier

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to success—man's inability to control the caprice of the weather.

Indeed, the gods were unpropitious, as the Lama oracles had foretold. Base Camp on the Rongbuk Glacier, and the lower camps, as already described, were established without too great difficulty. It was when the climbers came to Camp III that the mountain loosed her batteries upon them.

Snow and wind kept them prisoners in their tents.

Before them was the great ice-slope leading to the North Col—a slope that is a mountain in itself, 2,000 feet high, spears and points of steel-hard ice up which steps must be cut to reach the ridge where Camp IV will be set. A few strokes of the axe, in the hard, splintering ice, and one must pause, gasping.

Fatigue, tedium; the treacherous wind, colder than ice, tearing at one's foothold, making one cling face downward on the slope; silent, menacing drift of snow, slipping past. Prelude to the avalanche. Hour after hour, and but a few steps gained. A day's heart-breaking work, and then the blizzard in the night wiping all traces of the path away. Another day; again the work effaced.

At last a day of clear skies, windless, and four men tackle the slope. It is more dangerous now than ever; the cold nights, the wind and now the sun, have prepared the avalanche conditions. Here, in 1922, seven porters lost their lives. The risk must be run. Steps are cut; the path is roped and staved.

A great crevasse besets the path; they crawl across it on a snow-bridge. Boot toes kick into the deep snow, making footholds, and slowly, doggedly, they come to the great ice wall. Thirty feet it rises upwards,

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steeper than a house-roof. Steps must be cut with one hand; with the other they hold to the slippery surface. It sinks its cold fangs in their finger-tips; toes fumbling for the step beneath, are dead to feeling. The thin air, all its essence sucked, is icy fire within their lungs, ice-vapour that congeals at exhalation. The heart beats like muffled drums—Funeral March of a Mountaineer—dilation, pneumonia, height nausea, frostbite . . . which shall it be? Who cares? We must go on. Man in front there, and man behind, following.

Smythe is leading; we're near the top. To-morrow the porters will come struggling up, little brown devils, each with his load. Brave little fellows; what do they make of it, climbing impiously up to their heaven? Don't seem to think at all; follow on fearlessly wherever the white man leads, patient and silent, smiling their Mongol grins. They are like Police-ie . . . wonder if her ghost will wag a tail to greet us on the summit? Shouldn't be surprised.

Police-ie, a mongrel mastiff, one-eyed, lop-eared, faithful, who followed the strange white men from her Tibetan village to the ice-slope, 22,000 feet up Everest.

They always sent her back from the danger zones; she always returned, up the snow-steps, sure as a mountain-sheep, tireless, undaunted. She would not share their tents but lay huddled in the open among the baggage, on the coldest nights, or went on secret forays of her own.

In the mornings she would be found curled in the snow, her rough coat sparkling with frost. But, a bound and a shake and Police-ie was ready for another day's adventuring. Then, one morning, she was gone

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and the ice-walls, echoing the long-drawn calls of “Police-ie . . . Police-ie,” gave no answering bark.

Police-ie, broken somewhere in a deep ice-cleft, Everest’s humblest victim. Somewhere in that wilderness, beyond finding.

Now at length the task is ended, the pathway made, and a rope ladder hung over the wall of ice. The camp is established, tent on a ledge beneath the Col’s crest, 1,000 feet above the glacier. Eastwards, the mountains open, peak on peak, Kanchenjunga’s icy pinnacles towering above all.

Northwards, across the Col’s ridge, is the slippery way to where Camp V will be—Mallory’s way—upon the bare, bleak wall of Everest, another ledge, other tents on a ledge, another step towards triumph or defeat.

V

Camp V was the beginning of defeat. The climbers had hoped to carry it a point higher than previous expeditions had done, make it the last important base, holding four tents, a jumping-off ground for the still higher Camp VI. They succeeded in the end, but at the cost of several days’ delay and many minor casualties. Wind drove them back on the first attempt to establish the camp. Next day four of the party tried again, taking with them twenty porters, eight of whom were to sleep at Camp V, and help on the day after to establish Camp VI. They crossed safely the fish-bone ridge of the North Col and reached the rock face, where hands as well as feet have to be used in climbing. Here they found the relics of a previous expedition, a dozen oxygen cylinders,

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left on the site of the camp from which Captain Finch and his companions made their attempt on the summit in 1922. The oxygen was still usable. A climb of 500 feet up the steep rock face and they reached their point, a low gradient scree slope, 25,700 feet up, where there was room for the tent.

But Dr. Raymond Green, the senior medical officer, had to return to Camp IV with a dilated heart. Porters fell sick, and after a night of intense cold and high wind, those in charge of the camp decided that conditions were impossible for a further effort that day. The shelter of the sleeping-bags was the only possible barrier against the cold—a day of mummified inaction.

Smythe and Shipton arrived at the camp that day. Next day it was the same; and the next. In the end the camp was evacuated for the time being and the party struggled back through a blizzard, down the scree slopes and the slab rock, over the slippery tight-rope of the North Col, to Camp IV, frostbitten hands and feet adding to their miseries. They nursed aching fingers and undiminished hopes. Beleaguered by blizzards for three days and nights and coming through alive they were quite pleased. They called it becoming acclimatized.

Now little avalanches swept the ledge on which the Camp IV tents precariously clung. At any moment tons of crashing ice might slither from the Col's crest, 250 feet above, and skittle them down the ice wall to the glacier. They moved camp—upwards—to the very top of the crest where there was no danger from avalanches, and where they had a lovely view—panorama of peaks and pinnacles east and west, the

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world drowned in cumulus far below; sheer drop to the East Rongbuk on one side, 4,000 feet of ice and snow slope down to the main glacier arm on the other.

The worst drawback was full exposure to north-west wind. They took a telephone with them to keep in touch with Ruttledge at Camp III. Everest 25,000! It worked all right—no wrong numbers, but, unfortunately, they had run short of wire, so it lay in the snow right on the ridge between two precipices, and to get to it one had to steeplejack through blizzard drift and kneel perched on the edge of nothing, snow filling up the mouthpiece the while.

Up to Camp V again, this time with better luck, and finally the morning came when they set out to pitch their tents at 27,000 feet—the eastern ridge of Everest, the rocky semi-plateau called the first step. Steep going and some of the most dangerous climbing on the mountain.

Roof-sloping slabs of smooth treacherous rock, where there is no foothold except the grip of nailed boots; where a slip would mean a slithering plunge down to the glacier, 8,000 feet below.

Ten-minute halts, 400 feet an hour, all the glory of the mountains spread out before them to make them forget fatigue and that fell precipice.

They reached 27,400 feet, and where the ridge widened to about three feet they decided, this will be Camp VI. Other mountains now were dwarfed beneath them, the clouds parted and they had a vision of the Rongbuk Monastery, twelve miles away, 10,000 feet below, where friendly monks were praying to the gods to keep them safe.

From Camp VI on May 30 Wyn Harris and L.

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R. Wager made their attempt on the summit. It was arranged that they should be followed by Smythe and Shipton on the following day. Harris and Wager failed. Wyn Harris, attempting to glissade (the mountaineer's short cut) down a snow slope, found himself slithering with gathering momentum—not towards the bottom of the slope, but skidding sideways towards the awful precipice that overhangs the Rongbuk Glacier.

Turning over on his face, he grasped the ice-axe head, his body pressed against the haft, and twisted it round against the ice, slowly, because a sudden twist might wrench it from his hands.

It bit into the ice, ripped a groove, went deeper, held, and stopped his course when his feet were on the edge of the abyss. That was the result of mountain-training, instinctive obedience to the law that, no matter what the circumstance or danger, the tiny spark of reason must be kept aglow. No panic; if death comes, let it come in silence; hands holding on to life until the end.

It was the turn of Smythe and Shipton. They left Camp VI next morning, climbing silently, well, over the steep slabs, covered with drift snow, up to the crest of the East Ridge, to the foot of the First Step, guarded by its battlemented towers of rock.

Here Shipton failed; spent, beaten; and the problem facing Smythe was to go alone now or to see his friend back to the Camp. No, no, he must go on alone. panting colloquy through oxygen masks, aided by signs and gestures. I'll be all right; I'll struggle down; sorry, old man, but you must not give in.

And when he had gone Smythe turned from watch-

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ing the retreating figure to face his great adversary, David confronting Goliath. One Man against Everest. One man, alone—yet not alone it seemed, for here it was he felt the occult presence of the thing behind, unseen but sensed, a shadow where no shadows were, within him or without, he could not tell, spirit or pale projection of himself, he did not know. Angels and Ministers of Grace. . . .

He had no fear. The thing was friendly, powerful, not malign. Go on, it said, I'm with you, trust in me. You cannot fail, you cannot fall. I'm here to keep you safe.

And sometimes, though his mind said: "This is myth," he could not stay the impulse to turn and talk. Who are you? What are you? Words framed, unspoken in the mind; answered in psychic silence that was certainty: I am what no man knows, what each man is, Presence, Spirit, Soul, call me what you will, a Friend. Go on, I am still here.

Smythe felt as though this Presence were attached to him at the other end of the rope; but there was no rope now that Shipton was gone. He went on, the invisible companion on the other end of the impalpable "rope" following, towards Everest's most formidable defence, sheer precipice, 100 feet in height that cuts across the mountain's eastern ridge beneath the Second Step.

Only at one point, where it is breached by a steep, snow-filled couloir is this wall passable. The slab rocks were caked with wind-driven snow in which he had to cut steps. At points the snow was soft and treacherous. His nailed boots sank in down to the slabs below, one slip on which meant death.

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Their angle increased; he had to make detours. Ledges along which he crawled to reach the great couloir that drops 8,000 feet towards the glacier, led to nothingness. Back again and try another route, another and another, and at last the couloir.

Steps to be cut across it, in its hard-packed snow, and now here's the other side. So far (but, says Everest) no farther. Rock face, snow covered, 300 feet high. He set to climb it, sinking thigh deep in the snow, feeling his feet slip at every step on the slabs beneath, crawling upwards, sideways, almost leaning on the sloping rock face.

An hour's work, and he had only gone 50 feet. The summit was so near; he felt he could reach it, knew he could, once above the rock face to the foot of the final pyramid, and then again he knew that he was beaten. It was not altitude that beat him, nor lack of stamina despite the height; it was the cold, the toothed wind and the soft beguiling snow.

"Mountaineering," Smythe had written, "is almost an exact science. It depends for its success upon the accumulation of data, upon the amassing of experience and skill, upon the generation of a supreme confidence. . . . Mountaineers know that since Lieut.-Colonel Norton and Mr. Somervell reached 28,000 feet on Everest without oxygen, it is morally and practically certain that the final 1,000 feet can also be climbed. This should not be taken to mean that oxygen apparatus should be discarded, but that it is certain Everest can be climbed without its aid."

So poor Maurice Wilson had thought, whose body they had found far below. His way—mastery of

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mind over body. Smythe's way—slow advance coupled to acclimatization, but it must be steady advance.

At great altitudes, he said, the mountaineer, after gaining the maximum possible acclimatization, finds his powers, both mental and physical, gradually deteriorate. His senses become dulled, he loses his appetite, his sleep is fitful, his morale is insidiously undermined.

It may rest with the assault party to establish the final camp, within 1,000 feet, of the summit, if possible. Then, when all is ready, the assault party begins its advance, moving steadily from camp to camp, halting at each camp one or two nights to acclimatize to altitude, but not long enough to allow the baneful effects of deterioration to manifest themselves.

Then, if they can pitch their final camp within 1,000 feet of the summit, if the weather is good and if, as a result of perfect acclimatization they are supremely fit, they should climb Everest.

So much for theory. Putting theory into practice is a very different matter on the highest mountain in the world. But if uncertainty is cruel, it is half the fun of mountaineering, and Everest without its weapons of height, cold, avalanche, wind and blizzard would scarcely be worthy of attainment.

Many things had Smythe done and seen on that lone climb towards the high throne of the Buddha mountain. He had stood higher than man ever stood before, and, breaking bread, he tells, had turned to offer half to the unseen companion of his climb, so potent was the mountain spell upon him.

His eyes had seen the Apocalyptic vision of the time-birds, hovering above the depths of space, strangest

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of all the mountain phantasms. Yet his retreat was not a rout, but a regret.

He would have gone higher and he could. Mist drew a curtain over the peaks and through that dream-like mist he reached Camp VI. The unseen One was with him all the way. The bond held till he reached the tent and Shipton, waiting there.

Then the bond snapped and he was in the world of men again, lonely, he says, as though some friend had gone. He stayed the night at Camp VI, Shipton, now recovered, descending to Camp V, where Smythe would follow next day.

Storm burst and Shipton, caught midway between the camps, had nearly lost his life. Once, on the slabs, he slipped and hung by frozen fingers from a narrow ledge, groping for foothold, pulling his body upwards tooth and nail, to lie face downwards, spent, beneath the blizzard's buffetings. Go back, blind panic whispered, you are lost. Go downwards, Reason told him, to turn back is death.

Smythe wakened from a trance-like sleep, twenty-four hours later, to find himself half-buried in powdery snow that the wind had winnowed through a tiny hole in the tent. Almost cataleptic in the cold he made his way down the mountain. Hands and feet were numbed with frostbite; snow blew in his face, blinding him. The world was a tourbillion of whirling white, undimensional, obliterate. The hurricane tore at his blackened hands, wrenching them from the rocks, and only the mountaineer's sixth sense saved him from a death glissade—automatic turn face downwards till the axe point found a cleft in which it stuck.

At length he reached Camp V. Nobody there and

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the tents collapsed beneath the gale. He in collapse, too, but he must go on.

Someone had climbed to meet him from Camp IV. Hot drink from a vacuum flask and human help across the snow ridge of the Col. The hurricane had spent its rage above. The mountain-face was hid in mist; below the monsoon clouds were massing in the valleys. Everest had won again.

SECTION IX
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I

WHEN he leaned forward on the slope to rest on his in-driven ice-axe, he could see his feet, toes dug into the snow, holding; beneath them a few yards of wind-caked snow, and then, the glacier, 7,000 feet beneath.

Hacking the steps, the discs of snow dislodged, slid downwards past his feet with soft crepitation, and launched outwards into space. If he slipped he would go that way too—they would all go, roped together—into the abyss.

But not now, the summit within reach. Look upwards, not downwards. Above, projecting over the ridge, a flake of snow sparkled in the sunlight, a jewel in the mountain's crown.

"The flake seemed always so far away. Then suddenly to my surprise I could touch it. Driving my ice-axe in before me, I hauled myself up on both arms, crushing the flake beneath me. I found myself sprawling . . . face downwards across the summit ridge. My head was in the sun, my feet in the shadow. Huge columns of cloud were rising djinn-like from the blue depths into which I gazed. They swayed unsubstantially for a moment as I fought for oxygen. For perhaps a minute I lay gasping like a stranded

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fish, then, pulling myself together, swung astride the sharp roof-like ridge and began taking in Holdsworth's rope round the ice-axe. Presently, we were all congregated on the ridge."

Smythe had conquered Kamet. He was astride the top of the world, he and his companions of that epic climb, but still there was the ridge to cross and then the very peak itself to climb. The ridge, a razor-edge of ice and snow, swept downwards either side with steeple steepness. One by one the four gnome figures sitting astride it got to their feet, balancing as a circus-rider does who stands on horseback, then they started forward, not looking downwards into the shadows of the abyss, but ahead, with a fierce exhilaration of conquest that defied death. Smythe, Shipton, Holdsworth, Lewa, the porter who had accompanied them on the climb.

Across the ridge, tight-rope to its wider end, and there a sugar-loaf of snow, above, beyond, around it, nothing else—the veriest, topmost pinnacle, 25,447 feet above the earth.

Safe on the little base beneath the cone they seized the porter Lewa and pushed him on in front. His should be the first foot to tread the summit.

"As I clutched hold of him," writes Smythe in *Kamet Conquered*, "I could hear the breath jerking from him in wheezy gasps. I do not think that he quite understood what we were doing. . . . It was the least compliment we could pay to those splendid men, our porters, to whom we owed the success of the expedition."

They lay in the snow and gazed like gods across majestic sweeps of space towards horizons never seen

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before by human eyes. There was no sound in all that vast, illimitable solitude, except the beating of their hearts, their voices when they whispered. The air was like ice-crystal, cold and clear. Far away, beyond the mountain continent, cloud mountains heaped their peaks fantastically, high above the hot valleys and plains, high cumulus ranges rearing, piling unsubstantial massifs towards the sun.

Yet their topmost pinnacles were far beneath these men upon the mountain. Verily, this god's-eye view of earth and all that it inherit, of cloud-capped tower, solemn temples of the winds, gorgeous palaces of fluted ice and snow, had been worth the effort, even though it were to vanish like a dream, leaving not a wrack behind.

It was not Everest, they knew, nor Kanchenjunga, the unclimbable, but Kamet, next best in the Himalaya welter. Kamet, up whose slopes others had toiled and failed, now taken in the seven league stride towards the ultimate. Everest was not visible, but, a hundred miles away and more, they saw through the translucency of space above the clouds, Gurla Mandhata, Kamet's rival peak, and, so far away—it may have been illusion—the barrier of the Karakoram range, mountains so high, remote, unknown, that even Everest may be surpassed among them.

The Himalayas, scored, seamed and hump-backed, sprawled beneath them like a giant dragon. They lay in the snow and smoked pipes; took photographs. The sun was setting. Now for the descent. Across the ridge again, and downwards, down the steep roof-slope where the treacherous cake-snow slid beneath their feet.

“We progressed slowly, rope length by rope length,”

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writes Smythe. "How slow it was! It seemed as though we were doomed for ever to cling and crawl like snails to this snowy flank of Kamet. . . . In drove the ice-axe into the snow until it struck the ice beneath; the rope was hitched around it, and down went the first man as quickly as possible, until the whole length of rope was out; then he in turn anchored himself firmly, and took in the rope of the last man as he descended . . . we were tired men at a height of 25,000 feet, and a slip must be expected at any moment."

Lewa the porter gave out. Smythe had to relieve him of his rucksack with its twenty pounds or more of film apparatus. "Swinging it on to my back overbalanced me, and my tired legs almost collapsed beneath me. Yet, even at that moment, I said to myself that as the 'damned thing' had been got to the summit, it somehow had to be got down again."

In the end, they had to abandon the films, 1,000 feet from the camp, where it could be recovered again. The sun was going; the shadow of Kamet engulfed them and the cold breath of the coming night crept into their veins, seeping at heart and brain. Lewa practically had to be carried most of the way. Sometimes, when frost-deadened feet fumbled for a foothold the snow broke and only the ice-axe held them from a death glissade.

But they could see the tents now. A further effort, and food and hot drinks would drive back the creeping ice in their veins; the sleeping-bags would fold them, and the little flicker of consciousness that burned like a candle in tired brains could go out and leave them unafraid of the dark.

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"Night, a vast phalanx of purple, rushed up the sky." So wrote Smythe, who is poet as well as mountaineer. "The slanting rays of the setting sun flooded the Tibetan plains, throwing into sharp relief numberless little crags and hills that stood out like the fantastic buildings of some demon city.

"Day drained quickly from the peaks. A cold pallor invested the world. And now we witnessed a strange spectacle. As the sun sank in the west another sun rose to rival it in the east, but a sun with rays, not of light, but of darkness, that radiated upward to the zenith of the evening sky. It was the parallel shadows of the peaks in the west cast by the real sun across the sky to such a distance, that they appeared to converge in a point above the eastern horizon."

He remembered these things later. At the moment all he knew was a weakness so great as to make his body a thing without substance that groped and held by mere reflex; a mind that held to awareness of danger as the ice-axe held to the ice when the world slipped beneath his feet. There were Holdsworth and Shipton, in similar straits, and Lewa, gasping for breath with deflated lungs, gone green in the face with cold, his hands and feet cruelly frostbitten.

But they got him down safely. On the levels where Camp V was pitched. Supporting arms held them so that they did not stumble on the flat with feet grown accustomed to the kicking of steps in vertical ice-walls. Hot liquids poured down their throats spreading new life in tired bodies. They were too exhausted to eat much. There was too much to talk about—a second party was going to attack the summit in a day's time. But there was supper of tinned

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beans, tinned fruit and rum. Then bedtime. What they had dreamed of on the dark slopes.

"Shipton and I lay cosily side by side in our sleeping-bags, recalling the events of the day. Already they seemed a past chapter of life, and, as drowsiness gradually overcame me, they receded farther and farther into the forgotten. Quietness fell upon the camp. In the south, lightning winked and glimmered ceaselessly over the foothills."

II

The Kamet Expedition of 1931 does not enter strictly into the story of the attack on Everest, except that it is a stepping-stone towards the greater achievement, and that the conquerors of Kamet were Smythe and Shipton, two who have come nearer than any other to triumph on Everest.

From Kamet's glaciers fall the Gangotri and Alaknanda Rivers that go to swell the sacred Ganges, and to the high alpine valleys of that part of British India go the pilgrims from the plains in search of communion with the gods at the source of their being. Exploration of the valleys where these rivers run was the secondary purpose of the expedition.

On Kamet's summit, 25,447 feet, gazing through leagues of space, the climbers had seen mountain-peaks a hundred miles and more away, yet the Himalaya is so vast that no height would be enough to take its range within the span of vision. In Europe our highest mountain, Mount Blanc, is about 16,000 feet. In the Himalaya, as so far surveyed, there are:

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75 peaks over 24,000 feet
48 peaks over 25,000 feet
16 peaks over 26,000 feet
5 peaks over 27,000 feet
3 peaks over 28,000 feet

This vast 2,000 miles of mountain sprawl would stretch from Calais to the Caspian Sea; valley, plateau and pinnacle, nature in her most savage and most gentle moods. Hot hells of the steamy jungle lands, cold hells of the high reaches; lovely, flower-carpeted valley, bleak, wind-swept plateau, deep gorge where glaciers 1,000 feet thick have cut the mountain-side like a burin; ice ledges overhanging frightful precipices from which they crash with cataclysmic force; incalculable variations of weather and climate. All these the Himalayan mountaineer must encounter and overcome and there is no parallel in European mountaineering to guide him. That is the fascination of the Himalaya and the reason why men risk their lives to unveil her secrets.

Previous attempts had been made to ascend Kamet. First by the Schlagintweit brothers in 1885. They reached a height of 22,239 feet, a remarkable achievement in those far-off days. In 1907 Dr. T. G. Longstaff and Brigadier-General Bruce ascended to 20,180 feet, and in 1910 C. F. Meade, accompanied by two Alpine guides, climbed 19,300 feet. In the year following there were two attempts, that of Dr. A. M. Kellas (20,200 feet) and Captain A. M. Slingsby (22,000 feet) and in 1912-13 these two again, Meade with his guide going to 23,000 feet, Slingsby reaching the same altitude. Again Meade, in 1913 (23,500

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feet) and finally, in 1920, Dr. Kellas and Colonel H. T. Morshead (23,600 feet).

Kamet is in the Garhwal highlands of India, an Alpine paradise where the stifling heat of the plains is exchanged for the cool, clear air of the foothills. The expedition left those cool comforts in Raniket and marched through the minor purgatory of the Kauri Pass towards the base of Kamet.

Smythe describes their vision of the mountain in these words :

“ We breasted the slope and halted silent on the pass. . . . The Himalaya were arrayed before us in a stupendous arc. Our vision swept from the gorges of Trisul to the peaks of Kedarnath. Was it from the Kauri that the Hindu sage of old gazed upon the Himlaya and penned those inspired lines :

“ ‘He who thinks of Himachel (the Himalayan snows), though he should not behold him, is greater than he who performs all worship in Kashi (Benares). And he who thinks on Himachel shall have pardon for all sins, and all things that die on Himachel, and all things that in dying think of his snows, are freed from sin. In a thousand ages of the Gods I could not tell thee of the glories of Himachel, where Siva lived, and where the Ganges falls from the foot of Vishnu like the slender thread of a lotus flower.’

“ The snows before us were the snows of Himachel. A curving belt of purple haze marked the course of the Alaknanda River, sacred to every Hindu as the principal tributary of the Ganges. We saw Kamet as we had not seen it before—a queen among mountains.”

They were not the only pilgrims come to give

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adoration before the seat of Himachel. Through the Dhaoli Valley where the river rushed between sheer precipices thousands of feet high, they reached a camping-site, 11,000 feet high, to find another tent pitched there in the wilderness and to be greeted by an Englishwoman, Miss Gertrude Benham.

She told them that she had already been several times round the world, and had chosen that quiet retreat in order to be alone and undisturbed while making some sketches of the country and the people. She hoped later to obtain permission to cross the Niti Pass into Tibet and visit the sacred peak of Kailas.

Poor Smythe, when he returned to England with Kamet in his pocket, became involved in controversy with Wardour Street film magnates, over the alleged lack of human interest, dramatic cohesion, and "sex appeal" in his film of the expedition. Writing of it in his book he says, somewhat bitterly:

"The explorer who would take a record of his work should remember that unless he has something really thrilling to offer the film magnates and the public, his film will not prove acceptable; he must concentrate on 'human interest.' He must remember that his photographs of toil and difficulty on the 'Roof of the World,' which means so much to him, count for nothing when the 'accidents,' 'blizzards' and 'avalanches' can be faked in the studios. . . His miserable efforts at the authentic, his pictures of scenery, count for naught against the sensational products of Elstree and Hollywood. The public has been so soaked in sensational make-believe that the unvarnished truth is no longer anything but boring. . . The cinema audience of to-day would hardly

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be content to see the conquest of Everest without the introduction of a fatality. . . . those who sit breathing the disinfected air of a cinema are incapable of realizing the effort of the cinematographer who fumbles with frozen fingers at his apparatus on the snows of the Poles or the Himalaya. . . . Truth is dead, and those explorers who contemplate an unfaked film record of their expeditions will do well to mark the fact."

In the end everything was satisfactorily arranged. The film was shown after it had been edited, but a few shots of Miss Benham might have saved a lot of bother. Future explorers who succeed in reaching the summit of Everest, and find Miss Benham there calmly making sketches of Kanchenjunga must not omit to record the fact from every possible camera angle. It may not be English, but it will be thundering good box-office.

From the eternal snows of Kamet's peak they descend to the Valley of Flowers—the Bhyundar Valley—elate with triumph and jocund as Olympians trooping downwards to the plains.

High overboard, the mountains and the sky fleeced with tattered banners of the monsoon. Up there the angry gods preparing for elemental battle; awful green pillars of their icy parthenons toppling outwards from the precipice edge, crashing in splintered blocks to bound and ricochet across the glacier, out-thundering the thunder. Bale-fires flickering on ridge and crest, flame that was writhing spindrift snow, lit by the lurid crimson of the sunset.

Here they went "wading knee-deep through an ocean of flowers . . . sky-blue of poppies . . . deep

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red wine of potentillas. We filled our buttonholes and adorned our hats. A stranger had he seen us might have mistaken us—from a distance—for a bevy of sylphs and nymphs. But had he taken a closer look he would have seen, beneath a canopy of flowers, beards sprouting from countenances browned, scorched and cracked by glacier suns.”

“Towards evening, the sluggish monsoon mists drifted asunder. Summits peered through from immeasurable heights. Far up the valley the crest of Gauri Parbat glowed in the declining sun. Day’s cold fires were drawn by the dark stokers of night.

“Peace and contentment were ours as we sat around the camp-fire. Felt rather than seen were the peaks about us. A million stars eyed us. The voice of the mountain-torrent lulled us to sleep.”

III

And so down to the pilgrim route to Badrinath. Poor humanity huddling in miserable hut hamlets beneath the white majesty of Vishnu’s throne, beside the rushing, glacial torrent of the sacred Alaknanda River. This is humankind whose mind can conceive Vishnu—the mythological Vishnu of the temple frieze, of legend, or the pure spirit of the mountain and the ice torrent, gushing from the glacier, through the Valley of Flowers, down to the plains, the bathing ghats, the sweltering cities, and the corpse ashes carried out to the ocean.

Midway between two races, two aspects of the universal mind the mountains stand, Janus-faced gods; Buddhas, blind-eyed, inscrutable, facing the

K A M E T

cold Asiatic plateaux, deities with faces of wrath fronting the scorching plains of India.

On the high, Tibetan tablelands shaven priests in the fortress monasteries turn the prayer-wheels, or masked, muffled in rich brocades and aproned with skulls, whirl and stamp hypnotically in the ritual of the Devil Dance. All is cold, passionless, primitive.

This side of the mountains, the ritual is hot, hysterical. The cavalcade of pilgrims passes like a frieze from a temple in Benares, Maharajah, beggar, Brahmin, untouchable, Babu, fakir, filthy and distorted from immolation, old and young. This is India.

Princes in palaquins, the poor widow, barefoot, the stone hurting her feet. The Holy Man goes past wrapped in white, silent, abstracted. His destination may be a cave in the glacier ice, or release from living and the snows of Himachel. The naked fanatic comes, insane with cupidity and self-torture, crawling on his belly like a worm. All going to the temple of Badrinath where Vishnu shows his face, to the sacred springs that bubble hot from the depths of the earth and the icy-cold waters of the Alaknanda.

Through the procession of pilgrims went the small band of Englishmen. They, of another race and different ways of thought, who had been one with the gods, pitying, understanding. They ventured into the unknown Arwa Valley to climb Avalanche Peak, and there the expedition almost ended in disaster. Smythe, glissading down a slope, found himself the apex of a small avalanche formed by his feet pushing the snow before him. He decided to stop, and drove his ice-axe into the snow. But while he hung there and watched the snow careering away beneath him,

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"there came a sudden swish from behind and a mass of sliding snow carried me helplessly down the slope. Shipton behind had started to glissade and detached an avalanche on his own account.

"Lying on my back, I drove my ice-axe into the snow with all the force I could muster. For a moment I almost stopped, but then the weight of the snow piling up behind me shoved me brutally down the slope. . . .

"With desperate energy I drove my ice-axe again and again into the firm snow beneath the avalanche. . . . But it was too late. I saw the sliding snow in front of me shoot downwards and outwards over the upper lip of the bergschrund (ridge), with the lazy grace of water curving over a weir. Everything seemed to take place with incredible slowness. I remember no sensation of falling, no shock, but I found myself on the slope below the bergschrund. Then, without a pause, I was shot forward and downward again. I heard behind me a dull, heavy thudding as the tail of the avalanche continued to pour over the bergschrund. . . . My head and shoulders were free, but the lower portion of my body was in the avalanche. The sodden snow compacted. I experienced a terrible pressure—I thought my ribs were going to be crushed like an eggshell—then, abruptly, the pressure ceased."

He struggled free and stood up to gaze at the cliff over which he had been swept with the snow mass. "The difference in height between its upper and lower lips was fully fifteen feet, and such was the impetus of the avalanche that it shot clean over the crevasse beneath, which at this point was two or three yards wide."

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Had the avalanche slid slowly, he tells, or had the upper lip been less high, his grave would have been in the depths of the glacier, buried beneath tons of avalanche snow.

He escaped with a broken rib.

Next, to the Alaknanda Valley, to the source of the Ganges. In the precipice walls of the valley are caves in which the hermits find refuge from the world, fasting, naked, the load of sin upon them weightier than the mountains above their heads, their souls darker and more labyrinthine than the caverns in whose depths they hide.

The river's source, when they reached it, was a disappointment, not the torrent gushing from crystal walls of ice that would have been fitting reward for the effort of their pilgrimage, but a sluggish stream, mud befouled, seeping through the rubble at the glacier's foot.

They turned their faces homewards and a few weeks later, bathed, shaven and comforted amid the civilization of Raniket they looked upon the Himalayas for the last time.

In addition to Kamet and Avalanche Peak, they had climbed ten other peaks unnamed, the highest 21,000 feet, the lowest 17,230 feet.

"Our eyes had searched wide horizons," says Smythe; "we had sweated and we had shivered; we had experienced comfort and discomfort; we had gazed upon ugliness and beauty; we had known comradeship; we had found peace."

SECTION X

KANCHENJUNGA

I

MOST terrifying and most beautiful of all the Himalaya peaks is Kanchenjunga, the second highest mountain in the world. Everest's 29,141 feet is climbable, her glaciers, ice-slopes and precipices, formidable though they be, are friendly almost, and familiar to the Himalaya mountaineer. Within our time—given the right conditions, and leaving out the incalculable—it is probable that the summit of Everest will be reached, and that he who breasts the final step will live to tell the tale.

But Kanchenjunga, no. She is the white virgin inviolate of the Himalaya. Her peak, 28,225 feet high, is a wall of sheer ice in which there is no known foot-hold; her glaciers are precipices split by ravine and crevasse river-wide and bottomless; her precipices, glaciers set on end; her avalanches, cataclysms.

Yet men have stood within 2,000 feet of this dread summit, and Smythe, one of the party of mountaineers from Germany, Austria, Switzerland and England, who attempted to climb the mountain in 1930, is convinced that one day Kanchenjunga will be conquered by man. But not till the discovery of methods at present unknown to mountaineers.

Three attempts have been made to climb Kanchen-

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junga since the beginning of the century. The first serious assault was in August, 1929, when Herr Paul Bauer led a party of young Germans from Munich to the attack. Base camp established, they began the arduous task of reconnoitring approaches. One party of three made an attempt on the Simvu Peak, 22,360 feet high, reaching a height of 19,000 feet above the saddle which links the peak to the mountain. The other party reached a point immediately beneath a high saddle on the north spur of the mountain.

Their efforts were unavailing. Blizzards wrapt the mountain in a veil of mystery; avalanches swept the path in front of them; snow obliterated the traces of their way way up. They had to return to the base camp. The camp was removed to the western end of the Zemu Glacier, 18,000 feet up. Above them was a razor-edged spur from which they decided to make their second attack. Again the weather defeated them. For three days the blizzard raged; their camp almost at the crest of the spur was cut off and they had to retreat to avoid the menace of the avalanches.

They rested till the blizzard blew itself out, then another start was made. It took them four days to reach the summit of the spur, 20,000 feet high, and there they pitched their Camp VIII. Before them now to be surmounted was an ice-wall, pillared like a cathedral, fourteen ice-pillars of a height ranging up to 200 feet. There was no way round; each pillar must be climbed with the aid of ropes, steps cut in the perpendicular, foot by foot, pause for breath after each drive of the axe-edge into the steel-hard ice.

They worked without oxygen apparatus. It took them eight days to reach the top. They had to cut

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complete staircases in the pillars, up which the heavily laden porters could climb. Each day's toil ended when the sun set in eclipse behind the mountain and the cold of space descended upon them, they bivouacked on narrow ledges, like Simon Stylites on his pillar-top. Each morning, when the sun rays lit their ledge, they crawled from their sleeping-bags and re-began breath by breath, the cutting of their ladder; pitons wedged into the ice; rope fixed around them, another day, another ledge.

At last the top! They were on the roof of the ice-cathedral, 23,400 feet high. The summit of the mountain was before them, snow-slope running up to the last ridge, and then the very peak. Pray the gods the weather held and they could surmount that too, after the ice wall and the pillars.

They rested till October 3, then set out for the summit, hoping to pitch a final camp beneath the ledge. But the snow was knee-deep, soft, progress impossible. They had to return to the camp. Then swiftly, remorselessly, the snow began to fall. No wind, no blizzard, just the soft blanketing out of all the world around them, day and night, for three days on end. It abated and they decided to make a final attempt. Snow again, falling more heavily, blinding, whipped by a bitter wind. At night the temperature sank to 30 degrees of frost. They were snow-blind and frostbitten. They knew they must retreat or be cut off.

Steps had to be recut in the ice pillars for the descent. One group was caught by a small avalanche which swept packs and kit from their ledge. Isolated, they had to spend the night there at 20,000 feet without

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tents or sleeping-bags. When they reached the final base camp, in the end, it was six feet deep in snow.

But their great effort had achieved much. They had reached a height of 24,450 feet and, but for the treachery of the weather, might have succeeded in a dash for the summit.

II

Scarcely had the Bauer expedition retreated in defeat from Kanchenjunga than another party was assailing her dread slopes. They went in 1930, again led by a German, Professor G. O. Dyrenfurth, and including Swiss, Italian and Austrian mountaineers—with, of course, the indefatigable F. S. Smythe.

It is difficult to imagine a Himalayan adventure in which this great climber does not play a leading role, or to find a pen more graphic in describing for us the mental as well as physical strain of the high-strung mountaineer.

The story of this attempt, coming before his own conquest of Kamet, and his later climb alone to the highest point reached on Everest, he has told brilliantly in *The Kanchenjunga Adventure*.

It is not given to every man to stand beneath the towering bastions of rock and ice which are the Himalaya and know the lure, half-elation, half-fear, which they impose upon the spirit.

To stand, 16,430 feet above the earth in the wide pass of Guicha La, strewn with enormous granite blocks, great back shouldering peaks on either side, snow-streaked to the semblance of marble, shattered glaciers flung about the slopes, 14,000 to 15,000 feet

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high, and, framed between the valley's fretted walls, eight miles away, the cone of Kanchenjunga, a blinding, dazzling whiteness. To raise the eyes to Siniolchum, Kanchenjunga's sister peak, where she stands above the Zemu Glacier, a mountain clothed in fluted ice, its knife-like ridges fretted by wind and frost, so thinly that the sun shines through them.

Smythe speaks in his book of the "belief that a cordon is drawn round the summits beyond which man may not enter, where dwell the gods in icy detachment from the world."

He quotes Colonel Norton saying that Kanchenjunga is "a more formidable and dangerous proposition than Mount Everest."

Everest has no ice-walls on the scale of those of Kanchenjunga; her avalanches, terrible though they be, are not the overwhelming cataclysms of the satanic mountain. Smythe's party was almost swept to destruction by one such avalanche. He was in his tent, nervy and scenting disaster by premonition, the sixth sense of the Himalaya mountaineer. Something is about to happen, but when, where? A crash and a long sustained roaring, as though the mountain itself had found voice.

"An enormous portion of the ice-wall had collapsed. Huge masses of ice as high as cathedrals, were still toppling to destruction; billowing clouds of snow-spray were rushing upwards and outwards in the van of a huge avalanche. On the slope below was the party, mere black dots, strung out in a straggling line. They were not moving. . . . Now the dots were moving, moving to the left; they were running, but how slowly, how uselessly before the reeling clouds

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of death that had already far outflanked them. The next moment the avalanche had swept down upon them; they were engulfed and blotted out like insects beneath a tidal wave."

Yet they all survived except one native servant. The escape of the party was a miracle, such a miracle as can happen only in the Himalaya. The avalanche had been exceptional in extent. It covered an area more than a mile square; it swept the route on the ice-wall, completely obliterating the work; the snow-spray and wind-blast almost levelled the camp. Just as insects may survive a tidal wave, so those black dots on the mountain-side emerged from catastrophe. It was on too great a scale; they were too small.

Following this warning, it was decided to abandon the route in favour of the west ridge—a longer route whose possibilities for evil were unknown. No great Himalaya peak is so jealously guarded as Kanchenjunga. Its ice batteries rake every approach from the north, wrote Smythe. The huge northern face is protected at every point as though by human ingenuity—perhaps, indeed, by Kangmi, the god of Kanchenjunga, in whom our porters so firmly believe. Who else could have hurled down such an avalanche?

It is war, said Dyrenfurth. There is nothing friendly about those peaks. They allow no mistake; they are relentless, as though imbued with inhuman souls, conceiving only hatred to those who woo them.

It is remarkable in Himalaya literature how one encounters the recurrent deification of the mountains, how even the sternest mountaineer must think of them in terms of personality, investing them with potentialities evil or benign. It is easy, gazing from Darjeeling

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upon Kanchenjunga in the distance, unutterably remote, illimitably high, to believe in the legendry of Kangmi, of the Abominable Snowmen—the Mi-go. Easy and comforting to return to one's hotel bedroom where there is safety and sleep. On the mountains it is difficult not to believe the legends, in face of that awful majesty to dismiss the lurking ancestral belief that civilized man shares with humble peasants of the valleys.

Premonitions and dreams. In the Himalaya, as in a dark forest, one does not argue about psychic influences; fear of the great ice-wall.

"Through the murk the great ice-wall loomed coldly hostile. I have experienced fear many times on many mountains, but never quite the same dull, hopeless sort of fear inspired by this terrible wall of ice. I have often had occasion to remark how like men mountains are; some are friendly and others are unfriendly. Kanchenjunga is something more than unfriendly, it is imbued with a blind, unreasoning hatred towards the mountaineer."

Climbing along a knife-edge with Schneider, an Austrian member of the party, Smythe finds himself opposite a hole in the ice, through which he puts head and shoulders to gaze down the other side of the ridge.

"My sensations were no doubt similar to those of one who gazes out for the first time from the attic window of a New York 'skyscraper.' One glance was sufficient, and I popped my head back again. The downward view from *my* side of the ridge was sufficiently nerve harrowing."

One night he dreams that he is in a railway accident

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in which the coaches telescope one after another, with a series of appalling crashes. My own was just about to smash when I awoke trembling with terror. The crashes continued: each one was nearer than the last.

"With an almost animal-like quickness my mind grasped the danger—boulders were rolling down the slopes on to the camp! I struggled to get out of my sleeping-bag and tent, but it was too late, the former gripped me lovingly, the flaps of the latter had been securely laced up. I could do nothing but lie where I was and hope for the best."

To add to the horror of this waking nightmare on the nightmare mountain, his sixth sense told him that one of the boulders was coming straight for his tent.

"One side of the tent was occupied by my luggage, including a large tin box. Against this I rolled myself, hoping vaguely that it would break the force of the boulder. Actually, of course, it would have been crushed like an eggshell beneath the falling lump of granite.

"For what seemed an eternity I could hear the onrush of the boulder. It was travelling in bounds. One moment, with a crash, it would strike another rock, the next, it would fall with a dull thud into the yielding turf. There came a great thud not more than a few yards away, the next bound would assuredly bring it on top of me. . . . Then came a mighty thudding splash, and silence." The boulder had plunged into the drift not three yards from his tent.

Ice-avalanches from the north ridge and the coming of the monsoon made further attempts on the summit

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of Kanchenjunga impossible and the expedition was abandoned. A party under Smythe set out to cross the Jonsong La Pass and to climb the Jonsong Peak (24,240 feet). They made many strange discoveries—glacier lakes, for the most part below the ice—a glacier, twenty miles long, hitherto unmapped—marine fossils at a height of 20,000 feet.

In the year following, we find Bauer again at the foot of the great ice-wall, Zemu Glacier Camp. He comes with his young Bavarians and a party of 150 porters, those brave little men of the Sherpa and Lepchay races, “unknown warriors” of the attack upon the Himalaya peaks, who equal the western mountaineers in hardihood and keenness, following, loaded like beasts of burden, where the white men lead, up the vertical snow slopes, clinging to the rope; up the ice-walls, first on the summits, pushed there, gasping, bewildered, braving the wrath of gods who to them are real, confident and faithful in the service of the sahibs who are more powerful and cunning than the gods.

Their names are writ large on the Himalaya scroll of honour, their graves are deep in the crevasses, those of them whom the gods have smitten. But they are always ready for the new adventure, always there are volunteers.

This time it is war. At the foot of the ice-wall, the porters burn candles and fly prayer-flags in the snow to propitiate Kangmi. But Kangmi strikes. On August 9, Schaller, one of the German climbers and a porter, who are roped together, slip on the slope of a steep couloir. Their bodies go hurtling down. The others watching, freeze with horror at

the spectacle, but can do nothing to avert the disaster. Through Bauer's mind flashes the thought—which is a hope—the rope may catch, may break the fall. Then he is aware that no rope can arrest this double descent of two bodies whirling, tumbling, describing horrid arcs in the air. The porter on his rope-team screams and makes as though to throw himself after them down the abyss. To everyone watching that awful, never-ending descent of the doomed men, comes a like impulse, a sickness of vertigo, a dulling of the senses, death beckoning. They cling to the slopes, averting their eyes. It is over. The screaming porter is restrained somehow, strapped to a rock projection. The three survivors of Schaller's party, who are clinging to a rock over which the rest of the rope that held them all is slung, are rescued.

"We did not try to hide our tears," says Bauer, "and with all our forces we strove to build a tomb worthy of the men who gave their lives for the great cause."

The attempt went on. They overcame the vertical wall of rock and ice, 6,000 feet high, and established Camp X, at about 23,600 feet. And death was forgotten in the overwhelming splendour of the scene that spread before them. There, they seemed to exist upon another plane, uplifted, separated from the rest of the world by the precipices, up which, looking downwards, there seemed to be no way. They were translated. Beneath, gigantic glacier streams flowed through the valleys of the world which they had left, it seemed for ever; deep blue lakes gleamed among the ice. Alone, upon their peak, their vision leapt across the leagues of space, north-

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wards, eastwards and, birdlike, came to rest on other peaks, the holy mountains, Chumiomo, Lanchenghau, Pawhunri, Chomolhari—names that were incantations.

Higher still, to Camp XI. They lived in ice-caves. Bauer, suffering from heart dilation, decided to spend a night at Camp X. There were no tents or sleeping-bags there. In digging the ice-cave they had come upon a concealed crevasse. It made a chimney, open to the glacial draughts of space. But he lived through that night of agony somehow, and their ice-caves were an innovation in the technique of Himalaya mountaineering, proving the possibility of dispensing with tent portage at great heights.

In the end they reached a height of more than 26,000 feet to find a wall, 500 feet high, unassailable—final barrier of snow and ice—the everlasting “Nay” of Kangmi.

Yet, given conditions more favourable to the effort, Bauer came to the conclusion that the last 2,000 feet of Kanchenjunga can be, will be climbed, some day, by men of some new generation, super-men, it may be, accustomed to efforts greater than body and mind can summon to-day. Much the same conclusion as that to which Smythe was drawn twelve months earlier.

Such a man, or men, as Maurice Wilson. With Bauer’s present expedition to Kanchenjunga is the young Tibetan porter, Tewang, one of those who accompanied Wilson on his ill-fated attempt on Mount Everest in 1934. Tewang has related how he and the two other porters were amazed by the sparse diet on which Wilson lived during the night marches across Sikkim with its burning heat, and in the long,

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cold nights of the Tibetan plateau. It consisted of a handful of uncooked cereals stirred into water, and a piece of bread. The porters used to try to persuade him to eat hot boiled rice from their own billy-can, but he would never do more than visit their kitchen for some warm water to mix with his oats. When they remonstrated, he smiled. He would take out a small English-Hindustani vocabulary he carried, and, after a search in its pages, would announce that he was "like stone."

Cooked food, he assured them, was not so nourishing as raw grains and the bread and chocolate he carried with him. They doubted him, but they saw no weakening of his physique or resolve. He seemed to be without fatigue, and he was the first to set out on the midnight marches.

Acclimatization and rigorous training are the generally accepted qualifications for Himalaya mountain-climbing. Physique does not matter so much as character. Bauer's men train on the mountains of Europe for a year before the expedition leaves for the Himalaya. They carry loads up the Alps, sleep at high altitudes, live on a spartan diet. But food is pretty much a matter of individual choice.

Largely, all questions of failure or success in the Himalayas are dependent on the caprice of the weather. Time and again, where avalanche and altitude have failed to stay the advance, the mountains have fallen back upon that last defence, the storm barrage that rages for days, beleaguering the enemy in his tent, obliterating his lines of communication, sapping his morale, and, in the end, driving him in rout from the terrain so dearly won. Bauer, in front of his 500

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feet high precipice; Ruttledge, in his brilliant attacks on Everest, were beaten, not by the mountain but by the onset of the dreaded monsoon with its accompaniment of slushy snow, through which no progress is possible, in which steps cannot be cut: snow that loosens the steel gyves of the hanging glacier and sends the splintered ice-pillars crashing down.

It is the warning which must not be ignored. Lucky are they who, having gained the heights, are able to retreat before disaster overtakes them. Trapped, their fate is that of the German climbers who lost their lives on Nanga Parbat in the summer of 1934. On July 7, Herr Wilhelm Merkl, leader of the expedition, with an advance party of four men, succeeded in establishing Camp VIII, at a height of 23,000 feet, in full view of the summit, 3,620 feet above. It was the second expedition he had led to the conquest of this Himalayan outpost—the “Mountain of Horror” men call it in fearful tribute to the white-hell rage of its storms. Three other members of the expedition, accompanied by porters, attempted to take stores and equipment up to Camp VI and VII from Camp V. But the storm broke in its full fury. Snow jets miles long were blown off the mountain, so great was the force of the blizzard. Inside the tents men could only huddle, thinking anxiously of those others in the higher camp, exposed to the full violence of the storm. Beyond the comparative shelter of the lee-walls of rock was inferno, white, whirling; the shrieking legions of the mountain-fiends amok.

Head foremost into them the rescue party plunged with stores and equipment on a desperate sortie for the isolated camp—only to be beaten back. Late

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in the evening of the 8th two men came down from the high camp. They had risked their lives in the descent, in order to remake the tracks by which the others might descend. They told of the night of horror on the heights, and how the others would be coming later. But the others did not come. Merkl, with two companions and the remainder of the porters, were trapped on their ledge, cut off from the world by the steel bars of the blizzard. Next day conditions were worse. Any attempt to send assistance was impossible.

Then, on the 10th the storm abated and from Camp IV the watchers saw black figures coming down from the heights. They were porters. Four of them reached the camp badly frostbitten, and in a state of utter exhaustion. Nine of them, they reported, had started on the descent ; two had died on the way down and the other three, unable to continue, had perished at Camp V. All the tents and sleeping-bags had been blown away or snowed under. Merkl and his companions died on the mountain.

III

To the interminable wastes of the Himalaya men go again and again, answering the call which cannot be gainsaid. Through the steamy valleys and the jungle lands of the foothills they toil towards the high plains, under blazing suns, whipped by the pitiless winds ; counting the world they leave well lost if they can set foot upon some super-alpine peak. They thirst for the beauty of the gorges, gaunt and black as the walls of night ; the vista at the valley's end, of the white mountain, virginal, awaiting their coming,

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terrible spouse, whose kiss may be death. In the mind's eye they have the picture of the hillside slopes ablaze with rhododendron, scarlet as blood, battalions of silver birch and juniper marching towards the overhanging jut of precipice. They see the lost lakes, turquoise jewels in the silvery hem of her skirt, the jade glaciers wound about the snowy mystery of her bosom, her white face crowned with its wild nimbus of wind-blown snowdrift, and they know her as their bride.

Nowhere in all the world is nature so lovely and so cruel, so desirable. The little tent on the ice ledge, with the blizzard tearing at its flap, is remembered in the comfort and security of home. As men remember the rigours of war with its hourly threat of death, and think only of its comradeship in danger, its call to courage, so the Himalaya mountaineer recalls the hazards of the climb and longs to encounter them again—this time to overcome them.

Except for the towering, unexplored regions of the Amnyi Machen Range, the Himalaya peaks are without parallel. It was at one time thought that in the Amnyi Machen there might be found a mountain to equal, if not excel, Mount Everest. Dr. Joseph Rock, the American explorer, has told how he "shouted for joy," as he beheld the majestic peaks of one of the grandest mountain-ranges in all Asia.

The belief in a peak that might rival Everest seems to have arisen from a conversation Dr. Rock had in 1923 with General George Pereira, the famous British explorer, whom he met in Yunnan, shortly after he (Pereira) had completed his historic march from Pekin to Lhasa. Pereira told him of an amazing

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landmark passed on his westward journey—the great, snow-capped Amnyi Machen Range, which he saw from a distance of more than one hundred miles.

"Very likely," he remarked, "the Amnyi Machen, when surveyed, might prove higher than Mount Everest."

But Dr. Rock, after three years of exploration in the vast region, has not put the range higher than 28,000 feet.

In the story of part of his work of exploration, he describes how, after dangerous, difficult months, he reached the head waters of the 2,000-mile long Yellow River and the Amnyi Machen. "28,000 feet, or almost as high as Everest, its tallest peak lifts its snow-white head, majestic as the Matterhorn."

There, "in remote, almost inaccessible valleys, he found countless wild animals, still unafraid of man, peaceful as in Eden. Through deep, tree-lined chasms roared the upper reaches of the mighty Yellow River, flowing here at an elevation of 10,000 feet above the sea. Here in July was ice, and flowers bloomed in the snow."

Dr. Rock, "pushing his toiling way through canyons and over passes with odd, gurgling names," came to a territory absolutely unknown, even unnamed, beyond the ken of man—of man from the West, that is—men who adventure into strange new worlds and "shout for joy" to see the mountains clap their hands.

Yet in that earthly paradise, untenanted except for the tame wild things that stood to stare, they found man, fugitive, alone; pilgrim, nomad or saint; Cain, maybe, paying his devotion to the god Amnyi Machen by lighting juniper branches. He knelt down and

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bowed deeply three times towards the peaks, his forehead touching the ground.

There is one other secret mountain of the Himalaya to which the Hindu turns in ecstasy, to which the climber goes in reverence. Nanda Devi, highest mountain in the British Empire, 25,660 feet high. She stands within a barrier ring of the Garhwal highlands, seventy miles around, phalanx of warrior peaks, 21,000 feet high, guarding the inner sanctuary. Nowhere in this barrier is there a breach save where the Rishiganga River has cut a gorge, the starest, deepest abyss in all the Himalaya. Through this gateway is another range of peaks, double barrier which must be breached before man can reach the holy of holies, Nanda Devi, locked within her mountain maze.

Many attempts were made to reach the mountain's base, all failed. Dr. T. G. Longstaff, in 1905, reached the crest of the barrier ring, on the south-east ridge of East Nanda Devi (24,379 feet) to find a horizontal wall—two miles along, 23,000 feet high, connecting that peak with the mountain proper. He climbed another 1,000 feet and saw the southern face of the mountain which no man had seen before. Two years later, with General Bruce, he crossed the barrier wall from the north, climbing the Bagini Pass, 20,100 feet high. But the maze of mountains is unmapped exactly. Passes and gorges lead to culs-de-sac, whose precipice walls are prison-gates.

In 1932, Mr. Hugh Rutledge led a party up the Sunderhunga Valley to the base of the wall. 6,000 feet of rock and ice, it towered above them, on its summit a terrace of ice 200 feet thick, a mile and a half

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long. While they watched, appalled by the impregnability of the barrier, great masses of ice broke from the glacier's overhanging lip and slid thundering down the polished face of the precipice. There was no way to the sanctuary across that valley of death. Nanda Devi kept her secret.

It was Eric Shipton who last year was first to enter the hitherto inviolate basin from whose centre the mountain rises. It was only due to a series of freak rock formations that they succeeded in effecting a passage along a series of delicate traverses.

The last half-mile of the gorge looked so hopeless that they decided to try a route along the river-bed itself. After nine days' wandering in the wilderness they established an advance base in the Nanda Devi basin at 13,000 feet.

The country in which they found themselves was enclosed by a rampart of scores of peaks, 20,000 feet to 23,000 feet high. The only breach in the crater was the gorge through which they had come. In the centre rose Nanda Devi, whose sides were so steep that even ice could find little room to cling. North and south of the peak flowed two great glaciers, the streams issuing from which united some miles below the snouts of their respective glaciers and formed Richiganga, which later added its waters to the Ganges.

Here, as in the strange world of Nanga Parbat the explorers found an Adamless Eden where wild things had no fear of man. The Angel with the Flaming Sword has guarded well the gates of this paradise, and man penetrating to these solitudes finds the world as it was before God breathed the breath of life into the dust he held within his hand.

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The explorers spent several weeks there seeking a way up the mountain, mapping the southern basin. They climbed some distance up the peak and discovered what may be a practicable way to the summit.

It was a great and worthy exploit, undertaken by young men at a cost of only a few hundred pounds.

IV

A new attempt was made this year to climb Nanda Devi. At the time of writing news comes that the Anglo-American party of explorers who are making the effort have breached the demon-haunted Rishi Gorge and sealed the mountain. With them are Shipton and Tilman (his companion of the previous effort) and N. E. Odell, the geologist who proposes to study the glacier formations. The expedition has been planned by the Harvard Mountaineering Club and the British-American Himalayan Expedition.

Kamet, Kenya, Everest, and now, Nanda Devi, the Empire's highest mountain. Such is Shipton's record of achievement. "Tired Tim" they called him at school, a bored, dreamy boy who saved his pocket-money to go on mountaineering adventures in the Alps and in Scandinavia. During his exploration of the Nanda Devi basin, he lived for three weeks on native grain. He was twenty-eight years old.

Meanwhile Everest awaits the coming of her conquerors. The lesser peaks may fall to man, she is still inviolate. Man has gone as high as he can towards her summit; science knows as much as it need know of her secrets. The question is asked, why not be content? Why risk other lives in attempts to over-

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come the unconquerable? The answer is in the unconquerable spirit of man. Attempts may fail, but the effort will never be abandoned. The Polar regions are strewn with the bodies of heroes who died that later generations might triumph where they had failed. The air and the oceans have swallowed up their countless victims but voyages of discovery into the unknown go on without cease. Man seeks to conquer death by it. The urge that sends him on adventure in the Himalaya is a nobler emotion than the fratricidal futility of war. Better death on the mountains in the service of humanity than death on the battlefield for causes that are phantasms of fear. Lost before formulated; unworthy of one single life, within a year confounded and forgotten. The causes vanish in the mists of time. The mountains remain. War though it still rules the earth is a thing which all men execrate; its glory is departed. But the glory of adventure in the Himalaya, of defeat, of death, of ultimate triumph touches the common spirit and unites men in a brotherhood of endeavour.

There is an analogy in the determination of the mountaineer and the growth of the spirit in stature and wisdom. By his conquest of the mountains he conquers the terrors of the unknown. By braving the wrath of the demon-gods who invest their summits, he drives out fear from the hearts of the timid peoples who tremble at their base.

“These wise Tibetans,” says Younghusband, “think that merely to climb a mountain cannot be the true object of these huge expeditions coming out from England year after year . . . never reaching the summit. Whatever they do the mountain gods are clearly dis-

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pleased. They (the Tibetans) have the capacity of body to reach the summit any year they liked. But, they are lacking in spirit. All they attain to is the painting of pictures depicting the fierce anger of the gods repelling the English who dared to approach them.

"But in the end man will prevail. Another and another expedition will be sent to Mount Everest, and with the certitude of mathematics, man will prevail."

Before man can prevail there are many problems to be overcome, the greatest of which, physically, is that of the rarefied atmosphere near the summit of the mountain. Airmen can risk the lack of oxygen at these high altitudes, as was done by the Houston expedition fliers both over Everest and Kanchenjunga, but only temporarily, by expedient and without expenditure of effort. The climber cannot, or dare not. Acclimatization has enabled men to reach 28,000 feet, but there deterioration sets in, the bodily powers fail and the mind loses cohesion. New ways must be found to surmount these problems.

Politically, apart from the difficulties in the way of approaching Everest from the Tibetan side, there is the barrier raised by that other "forbidden land," Nepal, which prevents any approach to the mountain through her territories.

In many senses Nepal is a civilized country; she sends a princely representative to the Court of St. James, she is ruled by a benevolent if autocratic Maharajah, but hitherto all efforts to secure permission to approach the Himalaya from that side have been vetoed. No European is allowed to enter the

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'country except by special leave. There are no roads and no railways—the Maharajah does not want them—but in his capital of Katmandu there are wide, modern streets and avenues over which the latest make of motor-cars speed; there are palaces furnished in European style; domestic architecture of a high order, an army second to none in India, and an efficient administration which minds its own business successfully and allows no outside interference. It is the land of the Gurkhas, loyal to the British Crown, war-like, but living at peace behind their mountain barriers.

The only instance when permission was granted to approach Everest from Nepal was that of the Houston Flight. Colonel P. T. Etherton discovered the Maharajah to be "enthusiastic in advancing the interests of science," but one of the many deciding factors for his granting permission to fly over Everest from his territory was his admiration for King George V, especially for his fame as a crack shot, the Maharajah himself being first and foremost a crack shot.

But in Nepal, where Buddhism and Hinduism have wedded and combined myth and mystery in one, the Himalaya, and, above all Everest, is holy ground which must not be profaned by the foot of man. In the high regions, beyond the foothill jungles, dwell the saints. On the summit of Everest is the golden temple of the gods.

Etherton had a request from a "high personage," especially asking the fliers, in the event of their not seeing this temple when they flew over Everest, "to say nothing about it in case any such information might disillusion or demoralize the people."

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Over one border of the land looms Everest and her sister peaks, the other is guarded by the vast Terai jungle which separates Nepal from Bengal. Part of the jungle was laid waste by the Gurkhas—after the war of 1814, to impede an advance from India. In the jungle tigers prowl, in the Terai leeches drip from branches to suck the blood of man or beast who ventures there. Death stalks there in a thousand forms, armed with poison fang and claw, pullulates in the rank soil, hums and buzzes in the steamy air.

Perhaps there is more than political or priestly expediency in forbidding approach to the mountain that way.

v

Salute to the mountaineers! We leave Everest, as they leave it, with the memory of its majesty ever before us. Not many years ago it was unknown, unnamed. To us now, through the efforts of the brave adventurers who have dedicated their lives to its conquest, it is an abiding symbol of the highest endeavour, its noble English name, one that the gods themselves might well have chosen. Everest. How fortunate is he, that English soldier who has this as his memorial—the world's highest mountain. How fortunate they who shall grow old with memories of adventure on her heights. The journey upwards through the snows; step-cutting in the ice; bridging the North Col, and climbing higher, higher still, to stand at last beneath the last step, knowing defeat, but knowing elation also, and the thought: “Next time. . . .”

When will the next time be? For some of them—the

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pioneers—the time is past, for Bruce and Norton, Ruttledge. They grow too old. The younger men too, Shipton, Smythe, Wyn Harris, comrades of many a Himalaya climb, opportunity may come again too late. But just as Ruttledge now retires the leadership may fall to one of them, and the final triumph may yet be theirs—if not yet first at the peak, first to lead the party that prevails.

Fortunate young man, born or unborn, whose destiny it will be to surmount the final ledge, and, breathless on the top to cry: “Eureka; we have won!”

Salute to those who won maybe, and died—Mallory and Irvine.

“Lofty designs must end in like effects,
Loftily lying,
Leave them—still loftier—than the world suspects,
Living and dying.”

No man can think of Everest and forget the names. Their fate is still the great enigma of the mountain.

And Maurice Wilson, pitiful and brave. Last of all, the little mountain-men, the Sherpas, Lepchas, Gurkhas, camp followers of the white men, bearers of their burdens, sharers of their hardships, partakers, with them, of triumph and death. Everywhere in the literature of Himalaya mountaineering one finds noble tributes to these hardy little fellows who not only brave the terrors of the mountains, but must first overcome the greater fear of the unknown—the wrath of the gods.

Whatever gods may be, the unconquerable soul of man accepts their challenge. In driving them from their secret citadels in the high places he dispels the

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mists of myth and superstition which writhe upwards from the labyrinthine valleys of the human mind, shrouding the summits of attainment. On the apex of the mountain, clear, serene, he stands face to face, not with demon gods, but with nature God and knows that the experience of his uplifted soul will raise the total sum of human thought from the low denominator of material concepts to the pure abstraction of spirit.

Not gods, but God. The mountains will remain as symbols, as altars upon which the Presence burns. The holy fire will be conveyed to earth and men will raise their eyes toward the heights with a new vision of the eternal.

He who fashioned the snowflake, filagree petal, towards which the conquerors of Kamet climbed gasping, fashioned also Everest and all the thousand topless towers of Himalaya and made the mind of man as high above the dust from which it blossomed as are the peaks above the darkness of the valleys: more fragile than the snowflake, fashioned it to grasp the immaterial and to realize itself, at end, an aspect of the universal mind.

In conquering the mountains man adds the cubits of his achievement to the sum of knowledge. He widens the span of physical endeavour and opens spiritual horizons secret and remote as those revealed from Himalaya heights. Lost horizons. What lies beyond them in that range of folded mountains stretching nigh 2,000 miles along the southern margin of the great Central Asian tableland? Here are new worlds unconquered, worlds whose frontiers are girt by mountain-bastions, unscaleable, unbreached; sentinelled by warrior peaks in shining glacier armour,

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moated around by gorge and torrent, abyss-deep as the peaks are high.

But as the flea will find the armour's chink, so man (God save us for the analogy) must find the cleft in the rock and creep, exploring insectwise through the last defences. Against the gorges, grim and black as Gates of Hell, he may not prevail, but slowly, surely, with the almost comical pertinacity of the parasite he will prevail at last. The mountains in their itch may cast him off, but sleeping, they are surprised—the little pest has won by stealth.

Everest, irked to anger, sweeps a wild arm in avalanche. "Buzz . . . buzz . . ." the thing has taken wing, it is about his head ; he shakes his flaming plume, blows at it gusts of icy breath, sends it spinning sideways, downwards. . . . "Buzz" . . . it is back again.

Man must win. The mountains must bow their heads ; the barriers fall and the hidden valleys yield their secret. What are these secrets so jealously guarded behind pillared walls of ice? Beauty of the Garden before the Fall (this is the land, they say, in which life was made manifest) ; grim, purgatorial wastes, prefiguring earth's end, bleak solitudes of ice and snow, and silence whence life has long since gone, or hell's miasmic with the lava vapours of the Pit?

There may be each, and all. There's room for Seven Circles in the Himalaya folds. Men have had visions of such things from mountain-peak and from the air ; the deep basins with the boiling lakes ; bottomless gorges ; cauldrons of the clouds ; black jungles in whose night none knows what tiger shapes may prowl ; flowered and forested valleys where lion and lamb lie down in innocence as in the pastures of the poet's mind.

ATTACK ON EVEREST

When men at last have pierced the barriers what will they make of the strange land, what gifts bring? Peace or strife? Having prevailed against the gods who guard the outer walls, will they despoil the sanctuary?

Already it is war. Men go to the attack armed for offence against the malice of the mountains. The campaign is prepared for years ahead. One by one the mountains fall to man and crumble beneath the slow attrition of things, only the Himalaya and her sisters of the Asian plain resist.

But time is on man's side. The mountains were before, and will outlast him, yet they, as all the forces of the earth must yield before his urgency of will. Within the compass of his mental evolution, he has charted half the world. Before the voyage ends its last secret will be his.

